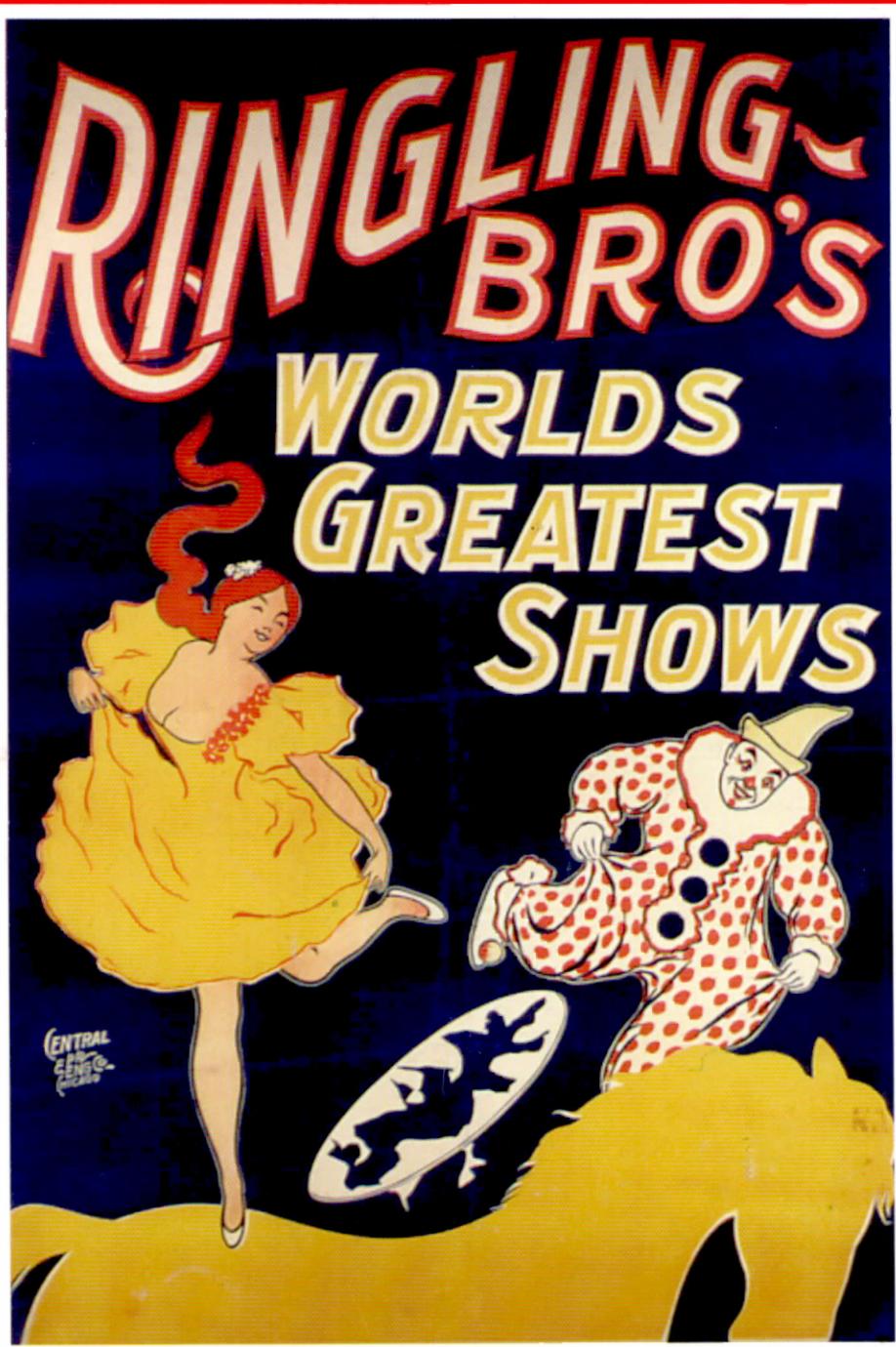


# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1996



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The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

The lithograph on our cover is very significant. The cartoon-like drawing and the use of color is avant garde for the period around 1897.

The Central Printing and Engraving Company of Chicago furnished all the date sheets for the show. Central also supplied Ringling with pictorial paper, including this poster. The poster is the only known example of their lithographing for Ringling from that period. The majority of Ringling pictorial paper at that time came from the Courier Company of Buffalo, New York.

Ringling's relationship continued with Central for many years. In the 1920s the Ringling-Barnum Chicago office was moved to the Central building at 211 Institute Place.

The original poster is in the special collections of the Milner Library, Illinois State University, Bloomington, Illinois.

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## EUROPEAN VIDEO TAPES

The *Bandwagon* has been informed by Telmondis, Paris, France, producers and distributors of audio-visual circus videos, that it is the owner of nine video tapes advertised in the May-June 1996 issue of *Bandwagon*.

The following videos have not been authorized for sale by anyone other than Telmondis: The 14th Monte Carlo Circus Festival 1988, Scott Circus 1995, Arlette Gruss Circus 1944, 2nd Massy Circus Festival 1994 and Festival of Tomorrow's Circus 1994. No further advertising for these video tapes will appear in *Bandwagon*.

*Bandwagon* does not endorse or assume responsibility for any products advertised in its pages.

## CREDIT CORRECTION

The Christy Bros. Circus newspaper ad on page 23 in the July-August *Bandwagon* should have been credited to Bob Brisendine.

## ADDRESS CHANGES

Please advise the editor in advance when you have an address change. We average four or five magazines returned each issue with a fifty cent address change charge. We can not replace your missing issue without charge.

We especially ask that anyone going south for the winter provide us with his or her other winter address.

## CHRISTMAS GREETING ADS

Placing an ad in the Christmas *Bandwagon* allows you to send greetings to CHS members.

A full page is \$95; half page \$55 and a quarter page (minimum) is \$35.

Send your ad copy and check to the Editor by November 15.

## BACK ISSUES OF **BANDWAGON**

1966-Jan.-Feb.  
1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
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1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1980-1986-All available.  
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1988-1996-All available.

Price is \$3.50 each. Add \$2.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

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CWM, INC. is dedicated to supporting America's leading circus history facility in its mission to collect, preserve and present circus history in order to ensure that these memories will last for generations.

CWM, INC. has made many projects a reality, including wagon restoration, purchase of a streetcar trolley for summer tours of Baraboo's historic sites, and funding toward the expansion of the Museum's Library and Research Center.

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# An Artifact of the Early Motorized Circus: COLE BROS. FRANCE TABLEAU

*Before a wagon is restored at the Circus World Museum, a rigorous historical assessment is compiled which documents the detailed written and visual history of the vehicle and the changes and modifications to which it was subjected. The following article is adapted from the assessment conducted for the France Tableau, which made its debut in restored form during the 1996 Great Circus Parade in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

The France Tableau is the only largely intact artifact of the most ambitious early attempt to create an entirely new motorized circus. It is significant for its unique origin and as an example of the circus carver's art of 1917, essentially the end of the procession vehicle construction era. Though manufactured nearly 80 years ago, the wagon endured only eleven years of actual use by circuses. It suffered more alterations while in private ownership than during the years of intended application.

Unlike many wagons of which the origin and ultimate disposition are obscured, little remains to be learned about the France Tableau. The name of the person who designed it is known. The firm which built it is recorded. How it was constructed is documented in photographs. The events which caused it to exist in its present state are understood. In stark contrast is the remarkable fact that it simply does exist, unlike the fifteen other sister vehicles which were claimed by fire, the elements and dismantling crews. It is the sole remaining artifact of an entrepreneurial streak in the circus business in the late 1910s, one which culminated in the founding of the motorized circus business the following decade.

The man who caused the France Tableau to be built was Frank P. Spellman (1879?-1944). A life long promoter, Spellman tried his hand at a wide mixture of show related activities and achieved varying degrees of success. His obituary characterized his career as "varied and spectacular." He spawned grand progressive ideas with great enthusiasm but did not follow through on their execution. Spellman's

**By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.**

life in show business began with singing, from which he proceeded to become a comedian. He then booked acts at fairs and conventions, staged competitions between early rival dirigibles and arranged automobile races, reportedly having over 300 artists under contract in 1905. The big Frank Spellman Shows, a railroad carnival, toured in 1908-1909. He then moved to New York City doing fair promotions and became associated with John G. Robinson (1872-1935), the last of the famous Robinson circus clan of Cincinnati. Together they put out the short lived 10 car Frank P. Spellman Shows, a circus, in 1914. Spellman then turned to promoting winter indoor circuses, not all of which were financial successes. He did produce the New York Hippodrome Winter Circus, a powerhouse of talent, for the Schuberts in early 1915. The activity for which he is remembered today, however, was his next big venture, the U. S. Motorized Circus of 1917-1919.

The application of internal combustion vehicles to transport circuses was not achieved with sustained success until the mid-1920s. Andrew Downie

Frank P. Spellman in 1914. Pfening Archives.



McPhee's Downie Bros. Circus of 1926 is generally credited as the show which developed the formula. The major difficulties to be surmounted by the new mobile shows comprised a combination of factors. Whether to organize an entirely new circus on trucks or to reframe from overland or railroad operation to motorized vehicles was a major philosophical problem. Overestimation of the capability and capacity of early motorized vehicles proved to be a common failure. Dealing with the unreliability of early motorized vehicles or coping with over-the-road servicing was a lesson to be learned. Lack of an adequate highway network to facilitate reasonable travel times without difficulty may have been the major drawback to success in the early ventures and one which was clearly beyond the control of field shows.

As early as 1905 Craner's New Model Shows employed an auto in the advance, perhaps the lightest circus duty for a motor vehicle. The following year an automobile mounted calliope was with the Andrew Mackay European Circus.<sup>1</sup> In 1910 one Howard Starrett used an auto for the advance along with four more with body modifications for hauling circus property. William "Honest Bill" Newton, Jr. (1879-1953) followed in 1911 with several motorized "buggies."

The lack of good roads was addressed by the National Highways Association with their Good Roads Movement. As soon as adequate mileage appeared to be in place, entrepreneurs pushed ahead with their plans for motorized shows and set about to make the motorized circus a reality. The shortcomings of early roads caused one overly optimistic circus owner to claim that he would send crews of workers ahead of the circus to make the roads serviceable. Similar to the first circus owners to travel the 1869 transcontinental railroad, the early truck circus operators surely regarded themselves as pioneers conquering a new frontier.

In the late 1910s the circus industry was a mature enterprise a decade into its decline. The leading shows, protecting their investments and self-

secure methods of operation, were content to let others take the lead with the new technology, retaining the anachronistic horses and wagons decades after other commercial businesses had embraced internal combustion engines in place of hay burners. When someone in the Ringling organization was asked about motorizing in 1918, he responded with two answers. First, and probably accurately, it was felt that motorizing the Ringling circus then would not be feasible because of its size and the length of jumps it made. The second part of the response was more revealing of an ingrained philosophy. The spokesperson stated, "The old horse and wagon has been entirely too faithful to be discarded. What would the circus mean to the kids without the long lines of horses pulling the creaking wagons in the early morning light? The smell of gasoline would rob the circus of all romance."<sup>2</sup>

Given the contemporary field show management mentality, the early attempts at motorizing a circus were not staged by the big railroad outfits but by overland shows attempting to upgrade or by relative newcomers trying to make their mark in a developing area. The latter were made possible by financing from outside the circus business, sometimes via joint ventures with motor truck manufacturers who were eager to prove the road worthiness of their vehicles in difficult service. There is but one example of a rail show converting to motorized service. Like the other early motorized shows, it also failed. A review of these early efforts will place the Spellman motorized show in the context of its time.

Among the first overland circus owners to acquire a number of trucks was Ernest Haag (1866-1935), who added a number of Reliance trucks to his show by 1916. One was eventually fitted with the sides of a small band chariot, others did general haulage and show advertising. Haag's show eventually developed into a complete and successful motorized circus. Other small overland shows which augmented their horse power with gasoline include the Silver Family Shows of 1916 and the 1918 Tompkins Wild West.

George Sun (1862-1917), a knowledgeable overland and railroad circus proprietor, made contact with at least three truck manufacturers with the intention to frame a complete motorized circus for 1916. Despite the intensive attention to engineering and the



A truck used by the Honest Bill Show in 1917. Pfening Archives.

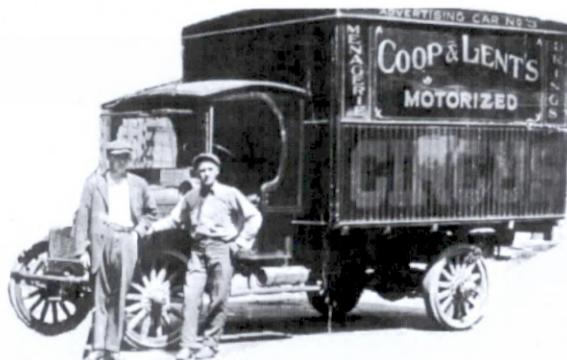
compilation of a detailed business plan, Sun apparently lacked the capital or business acumen necessary to frame the show. He tried to trade the free advertising from the show use of trucks for the cost of the vehicles, but the manufacturers apparently did not buy into the approach or were insufficiently funded to finance the enterprise themselves.

An old showman seeking to make a last mark was Sig Sautelle (1848-1928), who with Oscar Lowande (1877-1956) launched a seventeen truck circus for 1917. The Sig Sautelle and Oscar Lowande Monster/Mammoth Motor Truck Circus reportedly toughed out three months in New England before folding.

Richard T. Ringling (1895-1931), son of one of the original Ringling brothers, looked to make his name in the circus world with a hybrid overland-motorized show, his R. T. Richards Circus of 1917. With wagons pulled by horses and other loads hauled by Selden trucks from Rochester, New York, the tour was less than successful. Planned improvements for a 1918 show were nixed by the onset of war. Ringling's outfit proved that operating a hybrid circus with selective use of railroad show procedures would not work.

At least two Kelly-Springfield trucks

A truck used by the 1918 Coop & Lent Circus. Pfening Archives.



were acquired by William "Lucky Bill" Newton, Sr. (1859-1937) for his 1917 attempt with motorized operations. Despite the anticipated problems with country roads, Newton, in conjunction with his son, "Honest Bill," stuck with the internal combustion vehicles, having five or more on their combined 1918 show. Though they did not have complete and continuous motorized operations over the next few years, the Newtons apparently realized some of the financial benefits frequently ascribed to truck utilization.

The Coop & Lent Circus, an unsuccessful railroad show of 1916-1917, was converted to truck operation for 1918. Owned by the Horne brothers of Kansas City, Missouri, inventive circus agent and producer R. M. Harvey (1869-1959) put up \$20,000 to reframe it as a motorized show and induced the Service Motor Truck Co. of Wabash, Indiana to supply the necessary vehicles. In addition to towing overly large trailers, the partners mounted the heavy rail show wagon bodies on the truck chassis, all with the concurrence of the Service engineers. The trucks proved inadequate for the loads imposed and the deployment of additional trucks to improve the situation was prohibited by the government as a result of World War I. The failure of the show provided confirmation of the contemporary mind set that it was not possible to motorize a railroad show and halted further moves in that direction.

The world learned of the plans for a great new circus via a news item in the July 8, 1916 *Billboard*. Backed by a reported million dollars of Wall Street capital, the front page news enthused that it would travel on from 60 to 65 cars, making it second only to the two Ringling-owned circuses. An opening was planned for April 22, 1918. Two weeks later, promoter Frank Spellman announced that the new U. S. Circus Corporation show would be the first entirely motorized circus in history and "revolutionize the outdoor amusement business."<sup>3</sup> A document printed sometime later rescheduled the opener to May 6, 1918, a harbinger of the future delays the show would experience.

Spellman recruited aeronautical engineer Roy L. Knabenshue as his Superintendent of Engineering. Knabenshue and his dirigible were once managed

by Spellman and he was one of the participants in the airship contest which the promoter arranged for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Knabenshue was associated with Wright Bros. Aeroplane Co. in Dayton, Ohio for six years before resigning to take the circus position. One can understand Spellman seeking out a person such as the airplane designer, judging that his cutting-edge technical expertise could be transferred to the planned fast moving motorized circus.

Also throwing in with Spellman was Max Fatkenhauer, builder of the Cleveland Hippodrome; London based spectacle producer Albert E. Kiralfy; and noted animal man Frank C. Bostock. The special souvenir book printed by the show heralded the "United States Circus Corporation presents the Spellman-Bostock-Kiralfy Combined Motorized Circus, The Colossus of All Outdoor Amusement Enterprises." By the fall of 1916 suppliers of every commodity needed for a circus were visiting Spellman's palatial New York offices, seeking to place their products with the new wonder circus.<sup>4</sup>

Though the trade papers remained noticeably silent, progress was being made on organizing this wonderful new circus which would reportedly travel on 65 trucks and 65 trailers. Early in 1917 the show revealed that orders for 100 trucks had been placed with the Kelly Springfield Motor Truck Company of Springfield, Ohio and for 100 trailers and sleeping cars with the Troy Wagon Company of Troy, Ohio. The order for the decorated truck bodies and dens had been placed with Al Bode in December 1916.<sup>5</sup>

By July 1917 Toledo, Ohio had been selected as the show's winter quarters and a full press was put on local businessmen by fiscal agent Harold J. Packard. Spellman had apparently been introduced to the Ohio community by a Mr. Cooper of the Willys Overland Company. A stock prospectus was prepared which included presumably inflated values, such as \$360,000 for 100 Kelly-Springfield 3-1/2 ton trucks, \$76,000 for 70 Troy 3 ton trailers, \$250,000 for the Circus Float Bodies and \$150,000 for the Bostock Menagerie and Wild Animal Show. Not valued were two Kelly Snakes (presumably a form of tracked crawler) and 15 Willys-Knight and Overland automobiles. The conveyances alone consumed nearly 75% of the

planned million dollar capitalization. Among the benefits stated for motorized operation were flexible scheduling which avoided railroad delays, easier loading and unloading and similar nebulous claims. For the gullible, the calculations revealed a startling 89% rate of return on invested capital.

The designer of the Spellman parade vehicles was George P. Bellis (1866?-1956), a banner and stage scenery painter who operated the Sunshine Studio in Wichita, Kansas in his later years. Bellis was born in New York City and went to work in a lithographing plant while still a youth of about eleven, a bundle of sketches and drawings under his arm having drawn attention to his talent. He became head of his department at 18 and stayed with the company for 20 years, moving to several major cities during his career. Bellis then joined several traveling theater troupes, traveling widely as he built and adorned props and backdrops with his artistry.

Tiring of travel, Bellis bought a place in Wichita sometime between 1902 and 1907 and then moved there permanently in the mid to late 1910s. In addition to principally doing banner and theatre work, Bellis also constructed automated figures and mechanical cities, built ventriloquist figures and was involved in the manufacture of mummified curiosities at one time. One of the few unanswered questions in France's history is how Bellis was selected and hired to design the float bodies. Perhaps it resulted from general knowledge of his work or via a search for a designer conducted by either Bode or Spellman. In his search for commissions, Bellis may even have made the initial contact or performed earlier duties for Spellman or Bode. The proud artist retained possession of some of his Spellman sketches as late as 1937 and

A Spellman tableau under construction in Bode's Cincinnati, Ohio factory. Circus World Museum Collection.



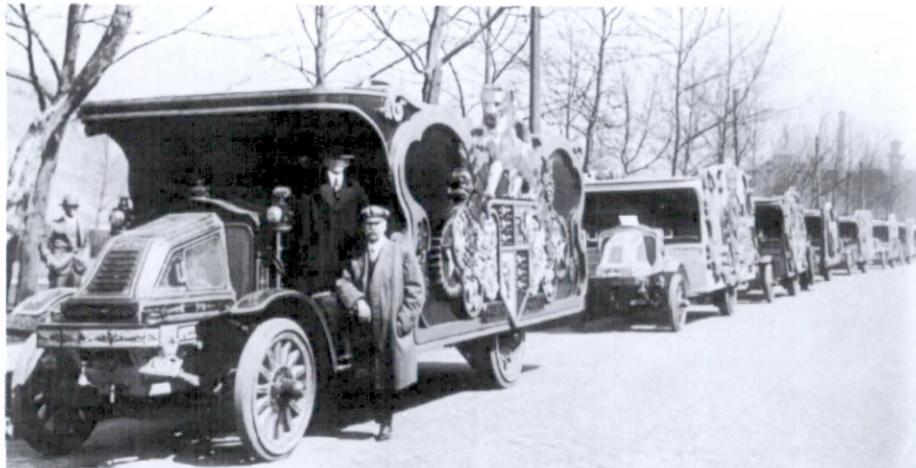
advised circus enthusiasts in 1942 of his contribution to circus history.<sup>6</sup>

To supply and mount the truck bodies, Spellman turned to Albert W. Bode (1869-1928), the 20th century's most prolific builder of circus wagons. This important Cincinnati builder of brewery and other heavy wagons made his mark in the circus world just as the business reached its zenith. Commencing about 1901 his shop began to construct very large and rugged baggage wagons and heavily ornamented parade wagons for virtually all of America's leading railroad circuses, Barnum & Bailey being the single exception. His vehicles represented a step forward in growth as his designs more fully utilized the loading space and weight possible with railroad operations, including the increased 80,000 pound flat car ratings. The lighter and elegant configurations associated with New York wagon builders of the nineteenth century were limited by a retention of overland transport ideologies. Bode's large box body tableaus may also have been among the first to fully and consistently exploit the dual wagon role of baggage hauler and parade vehicle, though the merits of this claim are unproven at this time.

The Spellman order suited the rational change occurring in Bode's business. As was common among wagon builders of the time, he was converting his productive capacity to the construction of truck bodies. Given the mixture of former circus work and new truck associations, the choice of Bode to accomplish the Spellman order seems to have been a good one. A reported \$75,000 was assessed for the Spellman work, calculating an average price of nearly \$4700 for each of the sixteen known floats. There are surviving designs for unbuilt Spellman cages, a bandwagon and carved truck cab arrangements. Bellis stated that he designed a calliope and monkey cage which were not built. Carvings

were created for, but never utilized, on Spellman wagons, at least some appearing on a later Sparks cage.

Further, Al G. Barnes bought enough carvings from Bode in 1922 to construct six wagons and in 1929 carvings for two tableau wagons and three cages still remained at the Bode plant.<sup>7</sup> All of this planned or partially executed work may have been represented in the \$75,000 cost, decreasing the average per unit price. Allowing for inflation but acknowledging that no un-



All of the tableau bodies built by Bode. Great Britain is at left followed by France. Pfening Archives.

dergears were supplied, there is little doubt that Spellman and his associates paid a premium for the work. Bode had made four grand tableaus in 1903 for the Ringlings which cost only \$1500 to \$1800 each. Perhaps part of the premium was the cost of wood and labor in pre-war years, the abundant leaf applied to carvings or the difficulty of producing carvings after the carvers sought alternate employment.

The Spellman job was the last great order placed for circus wagon style carving. The Moellers constructed about nine wagons for the Sparks Circus in 1921 and 1922 and some shows occasionally fabricated wagons themselves, such as the Sells-Floto steam calliope in 1920 and the Christy cages of 1924. Practically speaking, the big time manufacture of circus vehicles with carved ornamentation ceased with the Spellman order.

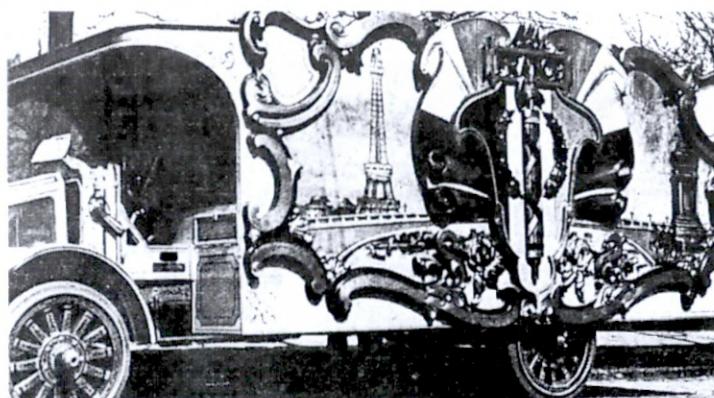
The design of the Spellman wagons did not follow the classical revival styles so popular in nineteenth century circus commercial art. They presented a simplified form of ornamentation. Fine art, itself, was undergoing a revolution in the early part of the twentieth century and the conceiver of the Spellman designs may have taken an eclectic approach to his commission. The art of the circus did not reflect American decorative culture after about 1900. The various art movements embraced by other fields, such as art nouveau in furniture and architecture, seldom found representation within circus creations, whether by the banner painter, poster artist or wagon designer. Comfort was found in perpetuation of the past, a secure short term approach

based on nostalgia rather than progress.

A few Spellman wagons incorporated figures and acanthus leaf derived scrolls, but the majority were comprised of simpler scrollwork and carved elements with painted decoration to exemplify the wagon's theme. Much of the carving was hardly more than sawn blocks of wood with rounded edges, with the finer executed details limited to the shields and symbols fulfilling the theme of the tableau. In the case of France, Bellis incorporated a fasces flanked by architectural symbols of the French nation, the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe.

A unique set of photographs long in the possession of Bode's grandson, Albert William Bode II, and now entrusted to the Circus World Museum via their donation, document the activity associated with the Spellman order. Within them one can see full scale renderings of the wagon sides mounted on the walls of the Bode plant. An artist, likely Bellis, is portrayed at work creating a full scale plan for Germany from the original artwork. The large plans served as a design and sizing guide for the plant carvers and body builders. Workers in the saw room are cutting wood, preparing the built-up blanks

The France tableau truck showing original paintings. Pfening Archives



for the carvers. Carvers are at work shaping the peacocks for the India tableau, while carpenters fabricate the framework and apply sheathing to the truck bodies. Albert Bode, the proprietor, can be seen inspecting one tableau when it was completed.

The so-called "South America" float may have been the first completed by Bode. A photograph of it was published in the May 1917 issue of *Scientific American* and a drawing of it appeared in *Popular Science*. That same month it was revealed that plans to open the show were stalled by the late delivery of trucks from Kelly-Springfield. By June Spellman had suffered a nervous breakdown which further delayed plans for the opener. More of the bodies were mounted on the trucks and a trial run was made to the show's new Toledo, Ohio winter quarters in August. In September, Spellman was forced to deny rumors that someone outside the firm was being asked to take the show on a fall tour. Louis E. Cooke, famed circus agent, joined the show in November 1917 to head up the advance and the opening was reset for May 6, 1918.<sup>8</sup>

A fire at the Bode plant in early 1918 threatened but apparently did not damage any of the Spellman advance vehicles.<sup>9</sup> A convoy of eleven of the Spellman floats was recorded in a photograph printed in the May 4, 1918 *Billboard*, which also carried Spellman's response to an article about the show opening which had appeared in the *New York Clipper*. The heavily pressured promoter stated that the owners would open when they thought conditions were appropriate, citing the ongoing war and its impact on the country as a real concern.

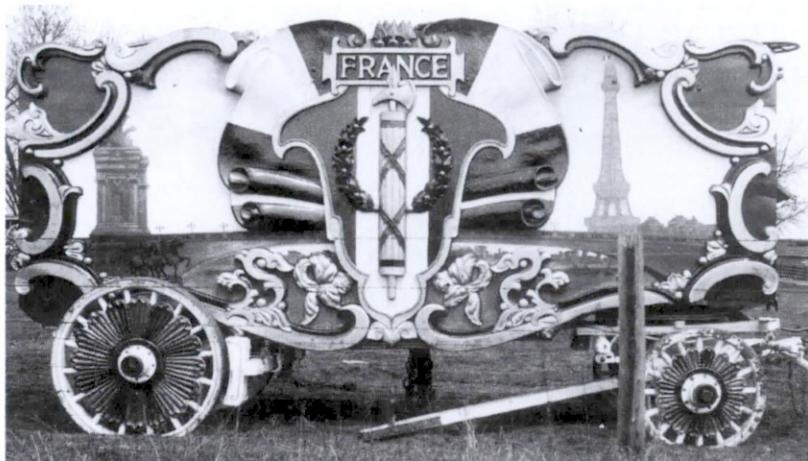
A lack of action in the remainder of 1918 and early 1919 caused Spellman to submit his resignation to the corporation's board of directors in April 1919. It was declined, no doubt because there was no one else within the organization with more circus experience than Spellman. Finally, on August 16, 1919 the show opened in Columbus, Ohio, blowing the scheduled opener the day before. Spellman blamed the railroads for the missed date, claiming that they had delayed the arrival of costumes from New York. Notably the show staged a parade on the streets of Columbus on August 16, perhaps the first truly motorized circus parade in American history.

A re-incorporation had taken place just days before, generating the America Com-

bined Motorized Circus Company with a reported capital of \$100,000. The investors were locals; no circus men were willing to risk their bankroll on the Spellman outfit. The dismal opening did little to satisfy the major creditors. Another date was played on August 18 at Newark, Ohio but after a two day delay in reaching Coshocton on August 21 Kelly Springfield representatives seized their trucks and other equipment.<sup>10</sup> Their action brought an end to Frank Spellman's ambitious project. It also resulted in the withdrawal of Kelly-Springfield from the truck business, such were their losses in the venture. It appears that only the hard bargaining Albert Bode may have escaped the losses which others incurred with the Spellman venture.

Three years after the failure of the Spellman circus the ornamented float sides were sold by Kelly-Springfield to long-time circusman Robert F. Schiller of Marion, Ohio. The purchase may have been made in support of Schiller's plan to open a circus the next year with his brothers John A. and Dick as partners. Only two months later the alteration of their plans was confirmed when Schiller offered to sell fifteen sets of tableau sides. Five offered for sale in November 1923 were priced at \$500 and \$600 per set, surely a significant discount from what others had paid Bode for their creations.<sup>11</sup>

Of the fifteen Spellman tableau truck bodies acquired by Schiller, eight went to a circus, five to a carnival, one was dismantled for local signage application (said to be Persia, but the description fits India) and one (probably Holland) reached an uncertain end. One tableau, themed for Germany, reportedly in the shape of a zeppelin, was never completed because of war sentiments. Schiller mounted the Spellman tableau bodies on wagon undergears to suit their buyers' needs. The five (Asia, India, Mexico and Russia, one unidentified but likely Japan) sold to a railroad carnival, West's World's Wonder Shows, were dismantled and mounted with a single side on a pair of wagons. Spanned by an arch or marquee, each pair served as a carnival show front. Others mounted for circus use retained the conventional appearance of a tableau with two decorative sides. There

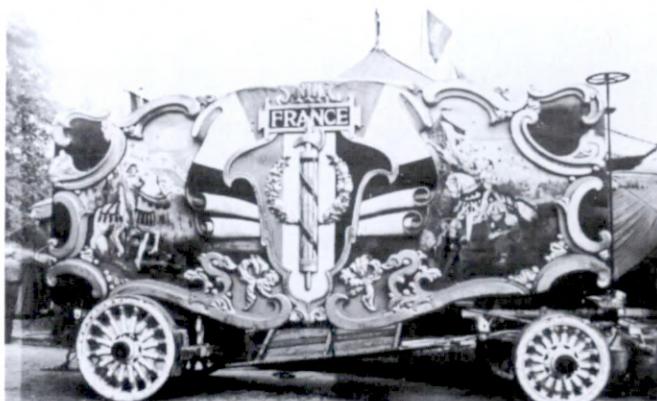


France with original paints at the Robbins winter quarters in Granger, Iowa in 1926. Circus World Museum collection.

are indications that the wagon construction work undertaken by Schiller was rather rough, the wagons having dissimilar undergears and unusual body construction. The undergear of France demonstrated that the stringers and gearing fitted by the Schillers were marginal, cross bracing being fitted in later years to restrain the body from being deformed by shear forces.

When the Robbins Bros. Circus played Princeton, Minnesota on June 27, 1924, three of the former Spellman tableaus were added to the enlarging show. The France tableau and another arrived when Robbins played Villisca, Iowa on August 16 and made parade for the first time the following Monday at Tarkio, Missouri.<sup>12</sup> By the time of the 1925 tour, Robbins owner Fred Buchanan had acquired eight of the former Spellman tableaus for his circus. They formed the basis of his parade theme, the "Parade of Nations," which was later augmented by the acquisition of the former Barnum & Bailey Two Hemispheres Bandwagon with its rep-

France on Cole Bros. with new paintings and new wheels in 1937. Pfening Archives.



resentations of other nations and the two hemispheres. The parade theme harkened back to 1903, an era noted for the emergence of the United States as a world power and the nation themed parades of the battling circus giants, Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros.

While with Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus, France was fitted with outside sunburst wheels. Buchanan may have supplied some of the wheels and undergears which Schiller utilized to convert the truck body sides for railroad show use. The original Spellman representations of the Arch de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower painted on the sides of the wagon remained intact during the Robbins years.

Buchanan piloted his Robbins Bros. Circus with some success through the 1920s but fell onto hard times with the crash in 1929. Buchanan relied upon Missouri horse trader William P. Hall (1864-1932), his old friend, to finance the show's 1931 tour. After losing money all year, Hall's representatives closed the show at Mobile, Alabama on September 12. The Robbins property returned to Hall's Lancaster, Missouri circus farm, where it remained for the next three years. Three other Spellman tableaus (China, Panama and South America) were cut from the Robbins show in mid-1930 and sent back to Buchanan's Granger, Iowa winter quarters, where they presumably met their demise.

By 1935, Jess Adkins (1886-1940) and Zack Terrell (1879-1954) were two of the most experienced circus managers in the country. Adkins managed the great 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus tour for the Ringling interests, earning the enduring gratitude of traditional circus fans by staging a great street parade with many old parade wagons. Erstwhile grifter Terrell had managed the Standard Oil sponsored circus at the Century of Progress in Chicago. They overcame their differences long enough to pool their resources, brought in some outside investors and launched the entirely new Cole Bros. Circus in 1935.

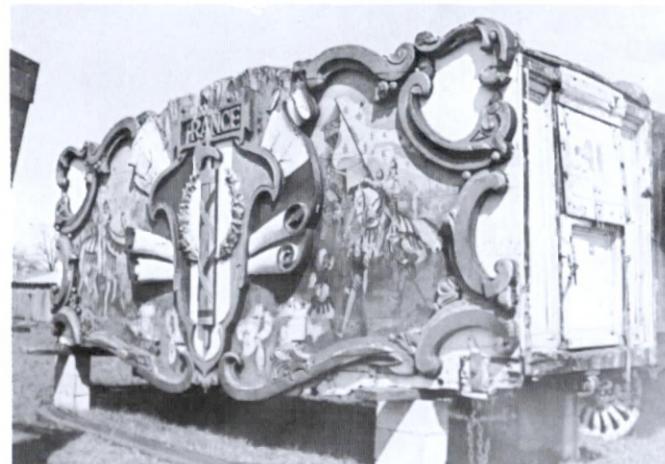
The accelerated decline of the railroad tent circus business during the depression made a number of defunct circus properties available to the

duo. Their principal purchase was the former Robbins property, acquired from Hall's heirs. It was augmented with the acquisition of equipment from the defunct Christy Bros. Circus and a portion of the former Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West property. These properties yielded a number of surplus items, including parade wagons. Many were in poor condition, having remained static and stored outside for nearly four years. All of the equipment was shipped to the show's new Rochester, Indiana winter quarters where the task of molding the assets into a serviceable traveling circus took place.

In selecting parade wagons for the 1935 tour, Adkins and Terrell passed over the majority of the ex-Robbins Spellman tableaus in favor of the more imposing Ringling and Barnum & Bailey vehicles obtained from Christy. Not until 1937, when the Cole show was expanded to 40 cars, was the France finally pressed into service. It reportedly hauled trunks and carried the second half of the big show band in parade. This facilitated leaving the Columbia bandwagon on the show lot during the parade, where it served as a ticket office for early buyers. Lesser painters did the basic color application on France and one Jimmy O'Connor of Logansport, Indiana did the finishing of the scenic panels. He replaced the architectural symbols of France with scenes derived from the Joan of Arc epic. All of his paints were cut with gasoline so that they would dry faster in the brisk April weather.<sup>13</sup>

The one physical difference in France between the Buchanan ownership and that of Adkins and Terrell was the rear wheels. While on Buchanan's show the wagon had larger rear wheels. No doubt the Robbins wheels were replaced in 1937 from the stock in Rochester because of their distressed condition. In 1938, the France was transferred to the newly launched Robbins Bros. Circus managed by Jess Adkins. There it served as the grand stand ticket wagon and carried riders in parade. When used on the lot, an illuminated sign reading "Grand Stand Tickets" was erected over the wagon. Between stands the France was used to haul trunks for the side show.

Adkins and Terrell shelved the Robbins Bros. Circus after the miserable 1938 season and placed one show, Cole Bros., on tour in 1939, incorporating equipment from both of their 1938 troupes. France was not selected for



France abandoned at the Bradley Farm in Rochester, Indiana in 1946. Pfening Archives.

use and remained in storage at Rochester, Indiana during 1939. It was again passed over for use on the 1940 show and was not in the paint shop on the night of February 20, 1940, when a disastrous quarters fire destroyed the four other Spellman tableaus (Africa, Belgium, Great Britain and United States) of the Cole show.

France and other Cole wagons were abandoned in the Rochester, Indiana area when the show moved to new winter quarters in Louisville, Kentucky following the 1941 tour. On at least one occasion a number of circus enthusiasts descended on the wagons and pried off souvenir carvings, never thinking that the wagons would be rescued for preservation at a later date. Some of these pieces have been made available by caring preservationists and incorporated in the restored vehicle. France, the Lion Tableau and the Cole Bros. "Asia" Tableau were acquired by the Block and Kuhl Department Store of Peoria, Illinois for placement in their annual Christmas parade about 1946. They retained a circus fan and model builder named Frank Myers to make the wagons presentable. Myers' work stabilized the wagons to a degree; however, he made numerous modifications which were undone by Circus World Museum craftsmen during subsequent restorations. Block and Kuhl's owner, Carson Pirie Scott & Company, placed the wagons in the care of the Museum in 1962.

#### The Restoration of 1996

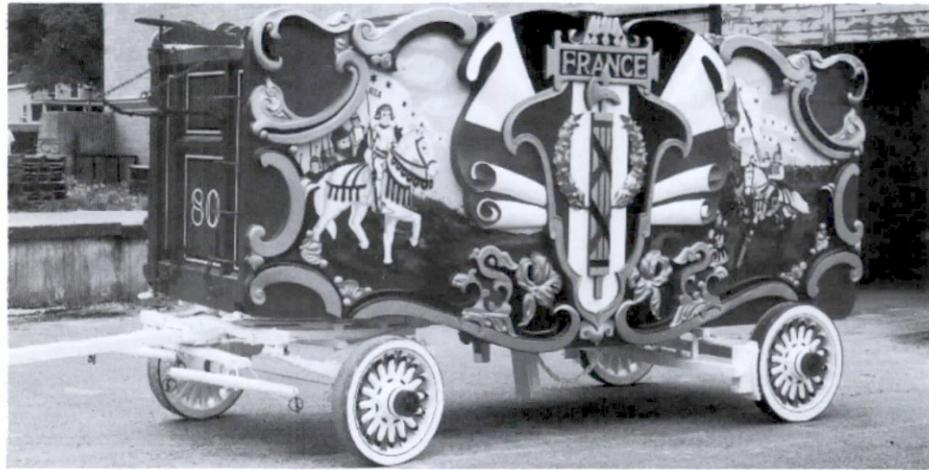
The principal decision to be made prior to commencing the 1996 restoration of the France Tableau was which year of its circus existence should serve as the guide for the overall plan. To return to the Spellman truck arrangement would sacrifice significant surviving circus material and require the

location of an appropriate truck chassis. The extant wheels were associated with the Cole and Robbins years of 1937-1938, and not Robbins of 1924-1931. This narrowed the choice to 1937 or 1938. Considering that the vehicle body was red for 10 of its 11 years of circus use supported the 1937 decorative scheme. That was also the year of Adkins and Terrell's greatest operation, the 40 car Cole show, of which the France was part. At least one other CWM-owned wagon, the No. 12 cross cage, represented the 1938 Robbins show, clinching the decision in favor of 1937.

The alterations made by Myers, including the top seats, front and back body panels, inaccurate replacement carvings and other details were all removed and replaced with construction faithful to the 1937 appearance of France. The paint scheme was developed from an examination of the black and white photography of the era, anchored by the knowledge that the colors of the tri-color French flag, red, white and blue, were significantly incorporated in the design. The final element in the restoration, the scenic panels inspired by Joan of Arc, were recreated by an artist using enlargements from 1930s photography. For the first time in nearly six decades, the France Tableau again documents the spirit of the great 1937 Cole Bros. Circus.

#### A Note on Numbers and Terminology

All of the vehicles constructed for the 1917-1919 U. S. Motorized Circus were called floats in contemporary accounts. After conversion to railroad show wagon arrangements, the conventional circus term tableau was applied to them. There are no known surviving business documents from the 1924-1931 Robbins Bros. Circus which might reveal either the wagon number or the name the Buchanan people applied to the France. It was assigned the number 80 on the 1937 Cole Bros. Circus and served to carry the No. 2 band in parade and trunks inside at other times. No formal documents from the 1937 show are available, but one list from Nat Green's *Billboard* files labeled "personally checked by the late Jess Adkins" specifies "80 Tableau Wagon 18." With the 1938 Robbins Bros. show the wagon was reassigned number 41 and employed as the grandstand ticket wagon. The circus fan compiled or copied lists from



The restored France tableau in 1996. Circus World Museum collection.

cus fan compiled or copied lists from the 1930s generally list the vehicle as the France Tableau.

#### Notes

1. *New York Clipper*, February 17, 1906, p. 1339.
2. *Baraboo Weekly News*, February 7, 1918.
3. *Billboard*, July 29, 1916, p. 3.
4. *Billboard*, September 23, 1916, p. 26.
5. *Billboard*, January 27, 1917, p. 22.
6. *Billboard*, December 12, 1942, p. 45.
7. *Billboard*, February 11, 1922, p. 68; letter from T. W. Ballenger to Jerry Mugivan dated January 21, 1929, Sells-Floto Collection, CWM. Other remnant carvings from the proposed Spellman bandwagon are now in the Ken Harck Collection.
8. *New York Clipper*, May 9, 1917, p. 16; June 20, 1917, p. 14; August 18, 1917, p. 69;
- Billboard*, September 1, 1917, p. 68; November 17, 1917, p. 3.
9. *Billboard*, January 12, 1918, p. 28.
10. *Billboard*, April 26, 1918, p. 28; August 30, 1919, p. 102.
11. *Billboard*, November 25, 1922, p. 80; January 6, 1923, p. 75; November 3, 1923, p. 81.
12. *Billboard*, July 12, 1924, p. 68; August 30, 1924, p. 114.
13. Gordon Potter in *Bandwagon*, March-April 1966, p. 16.

#### References

"Bellis, George," *Billboard*, January 21, 1956, p. 58; *ibid.*, February 18, 1956, p. 84.

Bradbury, Joseph T., "Building of the Great 40 Car 1937 [Cole] Show," *Bandwagon*, March-April 1966, pp. 12-21.

Bradbury, Joseph T., "The Coop &

Chindahl, George C., Papers, CWM, Box 4, Folder 22, "Mechanization."

Chindahl, George C., "R. T. Richard's Supreme Show of the World," *White Tops*, July-August 1949, pp. 5-6.

Dahlinger, Frederick, Jr., "The Bode Wagon Company," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1982, pp. 5-11.

"Frank P. Spellman," *Billboard*, April 1, 1944, p. 33.

"Frank P. Spellman," *New York Clipper*, December 30, 1905, p. 11, 42.

King, Orin Copple, "The Times & Troubles of Lucky Bill Newton," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1992, pp. 4-12.

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Pfening, Fred D., Jr., "Planning an Early Completely Motorized Circus," *Bandwagon*, September-October 1994, pp. 27-30.

Pfening, Fred D., Jr., "More About The U. S. Motorized Tableaus," *Bandwagon*, September-October 1964, pp. 14-15.

Reynolds, Chang, "Downie Bros. Wild Animal Circus, 1926," *Bandwagon*, January-February 1963, pp. 5-9.

## CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY FINANCIAL STATEMENT May 1, 1995 to April 30, 1996

Opening balance	27,013.35
Income	39,556.28
Expenses	<u>41,398.68</u>
Closing balance	25,170.95
 INCOME	
Dues	25,480.00
Subscriptions	2,298.00
Back issue sale	1,151.22
Advertising	3,388.50
Convention	5,123.41
Interest	<u>2,115.15</u>
Total	39,556.28
 EXPENSES	
Bandwagon printing	30,946.09
Bandwagon postage	3,171.00
Bandwagon addressing	1,820.37
Secretary expense	650.00
Convention	2,287.25
Dues notice printing	527.24
Directory printing	1,624.50
Bank charges	<u>372.23</u>
Total	41,398.68
Net loss on year	\$1,842.40

Submitted by Dave Price, Secretary-Treasurer.

#### Foreword

This article continues the story of the Al F. Wheeler and Jethro Almond owned circuses which began in the March-April 1995 Bandwagon.

As mentioned earlier Dennison (Denny) Berkery, who was on the 1930 Wheeler show, was the inspiration for this series. In correspondence with the author he mentioned being with Wheeler and Almond only in 1930, and although later research provides no information he was there in 1931, a possibility exists that he was, because he most definitely was on the show in 1932 and in an important and responsible position which will be noted later.

#### 1931

January 1, 1931 found Al F. Wheeler's New Model Shows in quarters at Albermarle, North Carolina, where it had been organized a year earlier. The first news of the show in the January 17 *Billboard* stated that Leo E. "Tiger Bill" Snyder's wild west show had been re-engaged for the season. Snyder was expected in quarters in time to build another stock truck to accommodate several head of new horses recently purchased.

Three weeks later Snyder said it was all a mistake, he wouldn't be with Wheeler but instead was going with the Seils-Sterling Circus where he would have the wild west concert with two truck loads of horses and seven people. Snyder was to play the Tampa and other Florida fairs before going to the show's quarters at Marion, Illinois.

In the January 17 issue Jack Phillips said he would again be with Wheeler as bandmaster. The prior year his band had attracted favorable press comments at nearly every stand. In 1931 he expected to have an organization that would surpass last season. Tom P. Lynch, air calliope player, announced he would also return to the Wheeler show, noting it would be his third season under the Wheeler banner.

The January 31 *Billboard* headlined an article, "Motor Circuses to Discuss Fair Trade Practice Pact."

"Owners, agents of motorized circuses will convene in Washington D. C. February 2 to discuss the possibility of securing a Fair Trade Practice agree-

# WHEELER AND SAUTELLE CIRCUS

1931-1932

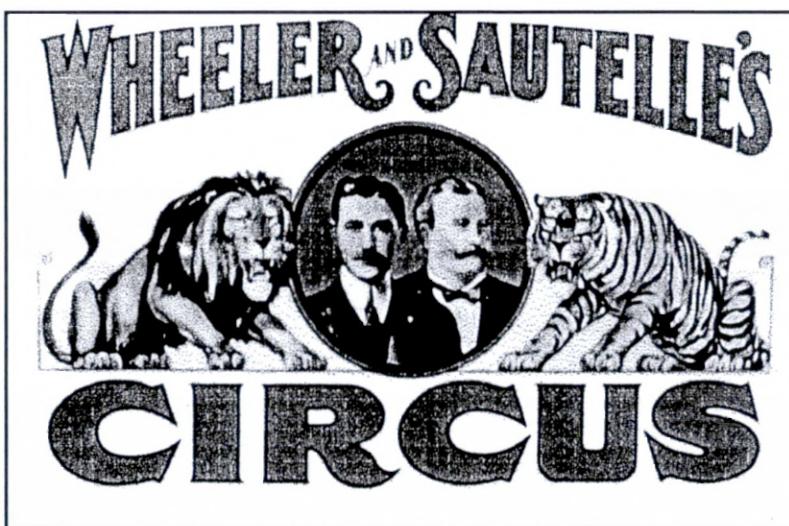
By Joseph T. Bradbury

ment. Meeting was called by Al. F. Wheeler and Jerome T. Harriman, general agent of Downie Bros. The conference is cooperating with the legislative committee of the CFA. Melvin D. Hildreth, chairman, who has promised to aid in securing the co-operation of the Federal Fair Trade Commission in the case a fair trade practice agreement is desired. It would govern the covering of paper, eliminate unfair competition and generally eradicate the evils that beset the field. Hildreth's idea is to go further and have repealed every law hostile to the circus.

In mid-February the trade publication said that Wheeler had been made chairman of the group. It now sought passage of a uniform motor vehicle code to allow circus vehicles licensed in one state to be recognized in others. The group would also fight the proposed federal regulation of privately-owned trucks engaged in interstate commerce.

A Wheeler want ad appeared in the February 28 *Billboard*, the first public

The Erie Litho Company printed this special portrait bill for Wheeler & Sautelle in 1931. The title is in red outlined in black. The two faces are on a blue background. The lion and tiger are in full color. Pfening Archives.



notice that the Wheeler show had a new name. The ad read: "Wheeler and Sautelle Circus, Direction of Eastern Circus Corporation want for coming season: Sensation act for outside exhibition with double in ring. Fast Comedy acts. Wild west people with stock and trucks; attractive young ladies to run concessions and work in side show, spectacle, and concert. Strong young lady for athletic exhibition (experience not necessary); musicians, strong

first chair cornet, trombone, clarinet and others (no cars wanted). Fiddlers for old fiddlers contest with double brass. Pit Show Manager (would consider party with feature attraction). Candy Package salesman. Candy Butchers. Lady to handle ball game. Fast stepping country route bill-posters, who drive truck. Lunch Stand privilege to rent. Must have attractive outfit. Preference to those with attractive house cars. Salaries in accordance with present conditions. All address. Al F. Wheeler, Oxford, Pennsylvania.

Sig Sautelle was a well known former showman whose circuses had been especially popular in New York state and New England. He died June 21, 1928 in Glen Falls, New York.

An obituary published in the June 28 *Billboard* provided this information. Sautelle was born George Satterlee, in Luzerne, New York on September 22, 1848. As a young man he learned the wagon building trade and worked in that business for several years in Saratoga, Glens Falls, and Fort Edward. His first venture in show business was with Connecticut's Great North American Circus, owned by A. B. Stowe. At that point he adopted the pseudonym of Sig Sautelle.

Adapt as a handler of wooden figures he became one of the best Punch and Judy men in the side show line. He later appeared in the Great Wallace side show.

In 1882 he framed a boat show. Opening in Syracuse, New York he played the old Erie Canal route for five years. In 1887 he converted his circus to overland wagon operation.

Sautelle joined with Frank A. Robbins 1902 in the operation of a flat car railroad circus. This show was sold at the end of the 1904 season to Jo-

seph McCaddon, the brother in law of James A. Bailey. McCaddon shipped the outfit to France.

In 1905 Sautelle formed a partnership with Mike and John Welsh, well known Lancaster, Pennsylvania showmen. Sautelle later withdrew from the ownership due to the poor health of his wife.

Sautelle was back in business in 1911. He joined with Oscar Lowande and George W. Rollins in the operation of a wagon circus using the Sautelle title. The show went on rails for the 1913 and 1914 seasons, using the Sig Sautelle's Nine Big Railroad Shows title. The circus was sold at the end of the 1914 tour.

Mrs. Sautelle's continuing poor health caused the couple to return to their home in Homer, New York, where he went into real estate. Following Mrs. Sautelle's death in 1916 Sautelle sold most of his real estate holdings, but retained a tavern which he continued to operate. He leased his title at times and toured his Humpty Dumpty Circus, traveling in a large touring automobile. In 1923 he was with the Dobyn carnival.

With a group of Glen Falls business men he framed an old fashion wagon circus in 1926. The troupe assembled in Fort Edward. Some animals were bought and wagons were built and painted, but Sautelle withdrew before the show opened, probably due to his poor health. This was his last show business venture before his death on June 21, 1926.

Other than the mention of Sautelle in the want ad there was no *Billboard* reference to that name. However the March 1931 *White Tops* reported that the Eastern Circus Corporation, representing Wheeler and Almond interests, had closed a deal with Sig Sautelle's Circus, Inc., through its president Frank A. Stovall, to secure the Sautelle title for a period of ten years. The title was to be used in conjunction with the Wheeler show, but if financial conditions improved the Sautelle title would be operated as a separate unit. The same issue reported that Carl Clark, who had trained Florida razorback hogs for Downie Bros., would be with Wheeler and Sautelle in 1931.

In March Wheeler closed his winter office in Oxford, Pennsylvania and went to the Albemarle quarters to attend to the final details of getting the show in shape for an early spring opening. A number of additions and improvements had been made



Highly decorated sleeper on the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus. Pfening Archives.

under the direction of superintendent C. E. Springer. All performers had been contracted for the season.

The March 21 *Billboard* contained a Wheeler & Sautelle want ad. Needed were a lunch stand operator and a pit show manager. Five young lionesses were for sale at \$125.

The March 28 *Billboard* reported superintendent Springer had the rolling stock in fine mechanical condition. Four new trucks had been added and improvements had been made to the parade equipment. General agent William J. Cain had his advance crew lined up and the three advertising trucks were loaded with new special paper. Several additional lengths of reserve seats were under construction. Charles LaBird would again have the side show and several new features were planned. Joe Brown was to return to the show as steward. He had been with Wheeler for many years.

By early April four new twenty foot long semi-tailers had been completed. One was to be used as an office, one as a walkover platform for the pit show and another as an advance billing truck. A service car with an air compressor and vulcanizing outfit had been added to the mechanical department.

The Wheeler & Sautelle cookhouse semi-trailer. Circus World Museum collection.



It was announced that the staff would include; William J. Cain, general agent; C. J. Williams, local contractor; Crawford Droege and Fred C. Williams with advance car No. 1; Russell Alexander and Jack Banner with car No. 2; lithographer Maxel Stendahl and bannerman Harry Hallman with car No. 2.

Wheeler & Sautelle ran this ad in the April 18 *Billboard*: "Wanted feature acts that double. Fast comedy acts that double clowning, versatile aerial team. Side show, novelty acts or any new feature. Pit show manager, must make strong openings. Fiddlers that double in band. Bill posters who drive trucks. Open April 25."

The 1931 circus season was now at hand. The first year of the Great Depression, 1930, had taken its toll of circuses. Especially hard hit were the railers. John Robinson, Christy and Floyd King's Cole Bros. would not return. Five cars were cut from the Sells-Floto and Sparks trains. The 101 Ranch wild west train was also reduced in size. Returning were Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars, Sells-Floto on 35 cars, Hagenbeck-Wallace on 30 cars, Al G. Barnes on 30 cars, Sparks on 15 cars, Robbins Bros. on 15 cars and 101 Ranch on 20 cars.

The motorized circuses to tour included Wheeler & Sautelle, Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, St. Leon Bros, Sells-Sterling, Hunt's, Schell Bros., Lewis Bros., Barnett Bros., Robbins (Sam B. Dill), Russell Bros., Walter L. Main, Knight Bros., Sam Dock, Todd Bros., Original Gentry Bros., Conley Bros., Olinger Bros., Henry Bros., Escalante Bros., Norton Ferris, and Circo Valencia (Tom Atkinson).

Wheeler & Sautelle opened the 1931 season on April 25 at West Point, Virginia. Six additional stands were made in the Old Dominion state.

The *Billboard* did not publish and opening review of the show. Circus fans Isaac Marcks and John Cutler visited the show in Rhode Island and noted that the big top was a 70 with three 30s. The side show as a 60 with three 30s. The only other tent on the lot was the cookhouse. The circus had a ten piece band and admission was fifty cents for adults and 25 cents for reserved seats.

The circus traveled on about thirty-five trucks in



cluding three on the advance. The cookhouse was in semi-trailer. The parade consisted of two bands, three floats, six cages, 2 air calliopes, two pony chariots, several riders and a number of decorated trucks. The show had no elephant.

Marcks reported that the twenty act performance included Florence Riddle, iron jaw, swinging ladder and perch; Arнетta Riddle, menage; William Grant, contortion; Knight troupe (6), acrobatic, tight wire, tumbling; Adam Damm and Six American Arabs, acrobatics and tumbling; Carl Clark, dogs ponies and pigs; LaBelle and Ray, aerial act; Roy Lenhart, contortion; Carver brothers, trampoline and acrobatics; and Lillian Rudisill, prima donna. Clown alley included James Carver, producing, Levi Phillips, Roy Richards and George Thomas. The Great Zelda did a head slide as an outside free act.

The concert was headed by Texas Ted Lewis and included T. P. Lewis, whips; Alfred Smith, Australian whip cracker; and Walter L. Kohn, steer riding and bulldogging.

The 1931 staff included: Eastern Circus Corporation, owner (Al F. Wheeler and Jethro Almond); Al F. Wheeler, manager; Jack Riddle, assistant manager and legal adjuster; Jethro Almond, treasurer; J. T. Cole, secretary and press agent back; Lee Wheeler, auditor; William J. Cain, general agent; Charles LaBird, side

A beautifully painted semi-trailer on Wheeler & Sautelle in 1932. Pfening Archives.

A Wheeler & Sautelle lot showing the big top at right and side show-menagerie at left. Circus World Museum collection.

show manager; Jack Riddle, equestrian director; C. E. Springer, general superintendent; Jack Phillips, musical director; Henry Richardson, motor transportation, chief electrician; Millard Bailey, boss hostler; Joe Brown, steward, Clyde Springer, light superintendent; Curly Welsh, property superintendent; Fred Gettle, ring stock superintendent; James C. Sauefle, 24 hour agent; Shorty Gelston, boss carpenter; and Harry Hough, animal superintendent.

The Sautelle name was displayed prominently, along with that of Wheeler, on the show's equipment and billing. A letterhead featured both men's portraits. A new lithograph featured Wheeler and Sautelle's portraits in a circle flanked by a lion and tiger.

Parade photos show a chariot type semi used as the lead bandwagon. Another open type semi carried a clown band. Another semi displayed a large steer from the wild west after show. A straight bed truck had an open platform with costumed performers. Two air calliopes were mounted on straight trucks.

A Roman chariot was pulled by two horses. Two straight truck cages pulled cage trailers. Another stake body truck displayed goats. Another semi-trailer carried the side show band.

Photos of motor equipment on the lot show a long semi titled and with Wheeler's and Sautelle's portraits on the sides. Also pictured is a trailer cage lettered Samoyedes Trained Pigs. The show probably had three straight cage trucks

and three 2 wheel cage trailers.

The show entered Pennsylvania at Oxford, Wheeler's home town, on May 4 and played two additional stands in the state and then moved into New Jersey at Flemington on May 7. A tour of New England began on May 12.

The May 2 *Billboard* reported the invasion of New England by several motorized circuses. There were indications that Downie Bros., Wheeler & Sautelle, Barnett Bros., and Walter L. Main were headed into the territory. The Ringling interests were planning to send the Sparks Circus into New England as opposition to the truck shows.

The circus advertised in the May 30 *Billboard* for a versatile team of performers and a lady to run a ball game.

After four Connecticut dates the show moved into Massachusetts on May 16 at Westfield for four additional stands. After a date in Derry, New Hampshire on May 21 the circus into Maine until June 9.

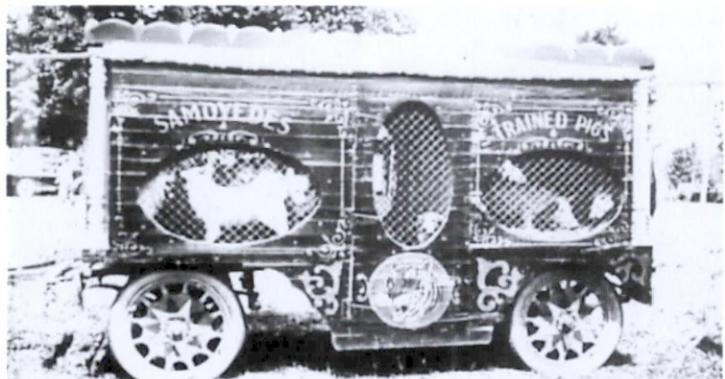
Wheeler & Sautelle advertised in the June 6 *Billboard* for a working brigade agent who could handle men and get results. Also wanted were: "Experienced bill posters who will put up paper. Alibi artists, tourists and floaters keep off. All must drive gear shift trucks."

The following week the *Billboard's* "Under the Marquee" column said that G. Kemp Hart had visited the show in Skowhegan, Maine. He said: "Business was satisfactory. It was the first time a circus has played in this territory. It is a good, clean outfit and has a very good program."

The show returned to New Hampshire at Wolfeboro on May 10 and played three stands before moving into Vermont for a single date at Springfield. It then moved into New York state for a tour of thirty-eight stands ending on July 27 at Jeffersonville.

The June 27 *Billboard* listed the roster of the Wheeler & Sautelle side

The four wheeled pig trailer in 1931. Circus World Museum collection.





The No. 1 air calliope truck. Circus World Museum collection.

show: "Charles LaBird Sr., manager; C. E. Springer, ticket box No. 1; Al Smith, ticket box No. 2; Raymond Carson, ticket taker; Hubert Utt, superintendent of animals; Al Smith, superintendent of canvas, with five assistants.

"The side show has a very attractive banner front. Performance is given in a 50 by 110 with following attractions: Naomi, sword box; Karl's Punch and Judy; Valedes, trained doves; Charles LaBird Sr., ventriloquist and magic; Madame Rudisell, mind reader; Charles LaBird Jr., comedy juggler; Earl Woltz, and his fiddlers convention; Belmont's 'country band' under leadership of La Bird. Six cages of wild animals were displayed."

In June two of the advance people made off with the No. 4 billing truck. The show advertised for information regarding the whereabouts of Jack Dilks, who used the name Jack Duane, and Maxel Stendahl, who were probably driving a one ton Chevrolet truck.

The July 4 *Billboard* noted that Downie Bros. had been refused a permit to play Claremont, New Hampshire on June 26. The town officials stated that one circus had already played there and due to the times one was enough. Wheeler & Sautelle had done wonderful business there.

The show advertised in the same issue looking for candy butchers, seat men, and waiters who could drive trucks.

Wheeler took his show into Pennsylvania for one stand at Milford on July 28. It then played four stands in New Jersey and four more in New York before heading back to New England. The New Jersey and New York stands were reported as very good.

New York City circus photographer Edward Kelty visited the circus in Cranford, New Jersey and was quoted in the August 15 *Billboard* saying the noon parade

resulted in long streams of people lining the sidewalks. Business was good at both performances and Kelty was impressed by the Knight family and the glittering paint on the trucks. He felt the show appeared to be about 25% larger than the prior year.

The second New England ramble began in Sharon, Connecticut where Earl Chapin May, soon to be the author of the first book-length history of the American circus, entertained members of the troupe at his summer home. May then spent a few days with the show. After two more stands it played a day in Rhode Island and then began a fifteen day tour of Massachusetts.

In August the show advertised for a feature acrobatic act for the big show, a versatile aerial team, fast comedy acts, a cornet player for the big show band, a fiddler doubling in the band, and a young lady for the sword box. The ad suggests that the Knight family may have left to play fairs.

While in Massachusetts Wheeler booked some late season fair dates, including one at Athol September 5-7. The Marshfield fair followed where the three rings were set up in front of the grandstand as a free attraction.

In Adams, Massachusetts on September 9 a fire started as a gas tank was being filled. The fire caused considerable damage to the truck and cage, but the three lions in the cage were not harmed.

By September 10 it was back in New York at West Sand Lake. The circus went into Pennsylvania on September 15 and stayed through the 26th. Six



The No. 2 Wheeler & Sautelle air calliope. Circus World Museum collection.

stands in West Virginia followed, concluding in Romney on October 3.

The September 26 *Billboard* announced that Wheeler & Almond would have two shows out in 1932. Wheeler's New Model Shows and the Sig Sautelle Circus would operate as separate units, both under management of Wheeler and Almond. Both outfits were to be of uniform size and several new ideas would be introduced in their programs. Wheeler & Sautelle had enjoyed a very satisfactory season. The 1931 tour lasted twenty-five weeks.

Wheeler & Sautelle did not return to Albemarle, North Carolina quarters, but rather leased space in the Petersburg, Virginia fair grounds. Financial reasons were probably the reason for the change of quarters. The show did not plan a southern tour and the Virginia quarters saved the long drive to the former location.

Economic conditions in the South were very bad in the agricultural sector. Cotton hit an all time low of five cents a pound. Even the words were obsolete from a song sung often by string bands in Georgia since the start of the depression, *Eleven Cents Cotton and Forty Cents Meat, How in the World can a Po' Man Eat.*

This letterhead was printed in red and blue. Another letterhead was used with the same design as the portrait litho. Pfening Archives.



AL F. WHEELER

Under the direction of  
EASTERN CIRCUS CORPORATION

# WHEELER AND SAUTELLE'S

# CIRCUS

## CIRCUS-MUSEUM-MENAGERIE



SIG. SAUTELLE



The No. 1 bandwagon with Jack Phillips' band on board. Circus World Museum collection.

The November 7 *Billboard* reported: "After the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus folded its tents at Martinsville, Virginia it is now stored for the winter in its new quarters at Petersburg, Virginia. Dame fortune smiled upon the show during its travels as not a serious accident was recorded, nor did the circus suffer a blowdown during the entire season."

After the closing Almond returned to his home in Albermarle. Wheeler remained at quarters.

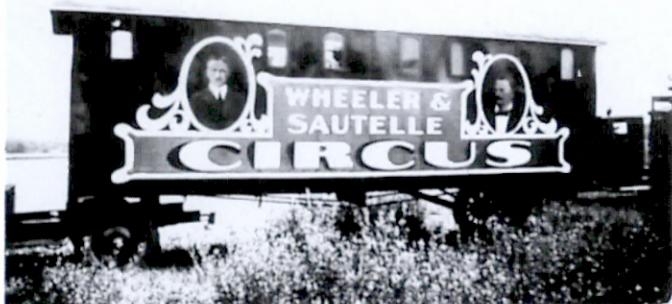
At the end of November the circus announced in the *Billboard* that many new trained animal numbers would be perfected in quarters during the winter months and leaps would be featured in 1932. After a brief vacation at his home in Albermarle superintendent C. E. Springer returned to Petersburg. Work had started overhauling the trucks and other equipment. Chief electrician Henry Richardson remounted one of the light plants on a new chassis.

A short item in the December 12 *Billboard* said Wheeler & Sautelle was having an Albermarle wagon company build three 24 foot semi-trailers.

#### 1932

In early January it was announced that Wheeler & Sautelle had engaged the Coriell troupe, six in number, who

Another sleeper used by the circus in 1931. Circus World Museum collection.



The clown band semi-trailer in a Wheeler & Sautelle parade. Circus World Museum collection.

would present their big acrobatic number. Vern Coriell's sensational head slide was to be featured. Carl Clark's animal acts had also been signed for the new season. At same time Al F. Wheeler advised that Jack Phillips again would direct a band of 12 pieces on the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus and another well known band leader, to be announced later, would have the band on the New Model Shows. The musical programs would be featured on both outfits.

No mention was made at this early date of the second show using the Sig Sautelle title. The main show would continue with its title Wheeler & Sautelle. The No. 2 show would be somewhat different both in title and format from that originally announced. Nothing definite about the second show would be announced until mid-April.

In early February the *Billboard* reported: "Al F. Wheeler of Wheeler Sautelle late last week in Springfield, Massachusetts, scene of the Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs Association meet, signed four fairs in New England, for his show, embracing ten weeks in all. Other territory for fair dates included New York, Pennsylvania, and possibly Virginia. Principal operations in New England fairs will be Athol, Great Barrington, Weymouth, and Marshfield, all Massachusetts. The show will carry its own billing, brigade, band and about 20 acts running about 90 minutes in front of grandstand."

At same time it was announced that Charles LaBird Sr. would return as side show manager, making his third season under the Wheeler and Almond banner. In addition to his other duties LaBird would also act as press agent back.

The February 27 *Billboard* advised LaBelle and Ray would return making their fourth season with Wheeler. They were to present their comedy acrobatic turn and high table rock, and would also work in Damm family flying act.

Much of the news concerning the show in the trade publication was about various acts and personnel to be with it in 1932, some of which proved to be incorrect. The March 12 *Billboard* said that Frank A. Goldie had been engaged to manage the annex. Goldie had previously been side show manager on J. Augustus Jones and Elmer Jones circuses, most recently on Elmer's Cole & Rogers baggage car show. Charles LaBird originally announced as kid show manager would not have the position. A number of new features were to be introduced, including an eight piece all white jazz band under the leadership of Bennie Kenner.

March *Billboard* reports stated that Clyde Lewis would be big top canvas boss. Texas Ted Lewis had been signed for 1932. His wild west unit used three trucks and ten head of stock.

The April 2 *Billboard* published the 1932 Wheeler & Sautelle roster: "Eastern Circus Corporation, proprietors; Al F. Wheeler, manager; Paul Newcomb, assistant manager; Jethro Almond, treasurer; William J. Cain, general agent; Stanley Brewer, local contractor; Frank J. Goldie, press agent back, side show manager and announcer; Carl Clark, equestrian director; C. E. Springer, general superintendent; Jack Phillips, musical director; Denny Berkery, superintendent of reserve seat tickets; Clyde Lewis, canvas superintendent; Charles Whitney, boss hostler; E. E. Staats and Leo Birle, superintendents commissary department; Henry Richardson, superintendent of lights; James Ross, property superintendent; Whitey West, ring stock superintendent; Harvey Dodd, 24 hour agent; Charles Prophet, boss carpenter; Wallace Landress, superintendent of animals; Chester Bush, blacksmith; Harry Benner, manager of No. 1 advance car; James Byerle, No. 2 car; George J. Harris, legal adjuster."

The Wheeler outfit advertised in the April 16 *Billboard* for a side show manager doing several acts. Also wanted were side show novelty acts, a calliope player, fiddlers, candy butchers and a banner solicitor capable of doing legal adjusting.

The same issue told the story of the No. 2 Wheeler show. Instead of a separate Sig Sautelle Circus, the new show would be a combination of Wheeler equipment and that of Tiger Bill's Wild West. It is not known if Jethro Almond had an interest in the ownership but it is assumed he did.

The article was headlined: "Two outfits consolidate. Wheeler show and Tiger Bill Wild West under management of Leo E. Snyder.

"Arrangements have been completed whereby the Tiger Bill Wild West and Circus which has been on tour all this past winter in the South will be combined with the Al F. Wheeler Shows.

"The new combination, which will be billed as Al F. Wheeler's Circus and Tiger Bill's Wild West will open April 23 under management of Snyder.

"Sid Lovett has been engaged as general agent and Harry G. Benner will have charge of advertising cars. George W. Gregory, who for many years has operated the Dandy Dixie Shows, will have charge of the side show and act as press agent back with the show."

Later in April it was announced that M. L. Kirtley, who for many years had been with shows managed by Wheeler and Almond, would be legal adjuster and advertising banner solicitor on the second circus.

Historians later stated that the Great Depression hit its lowest level in July of 1932. The railroad circuses were again seriously affected. Sparks, Robbins Bros. and Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West did not return to the road. Only the Ringling owned circuses, Ringling-Barnum on 90 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, on 35 cars; Sells-Floto, on 30 cars and Al G. Barnes, on 30 cars open that spring. Five cars were dropped by the Floto show from

A tableau truck pulling a four wheel cage. Circus World Museum collection.

the previous season, but five were added to the Wallace show.

Motorized circuses on tour in 1932 included Wheeler & Sautelle, Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, Sam B. Dill, Seils-Sterling, Schell Bros., Barnett Bros., Russell Bros., Walter L. Main, Hunt's, Harrington Nickel Plate, Gentry Bros., Seal Bros., Fisher Bros., Sam Dock's, Henry Bros., Snyder Bros., Kay Bros., Vanderburg Bros., Conroy Bros., Orton Bros., Stevens Bros., Barton Bros., Robinson Bros., McHale Bros., Norton Bros. and Wheeler-Tiger Bill.

A major change in the Wheeler & Sautelle circus was the elimination of the street parade. Walter L. Main also dropped its parade.

The *Billboard* did not publish a comprehensive review of Wheeler & Sautelle during the season. There were probably fewer trucks. In addition to not using parade equipment, longer semis were used which carried larger loads, replacing smaller vehicles. As in 1931 the circus did not have an elephant.

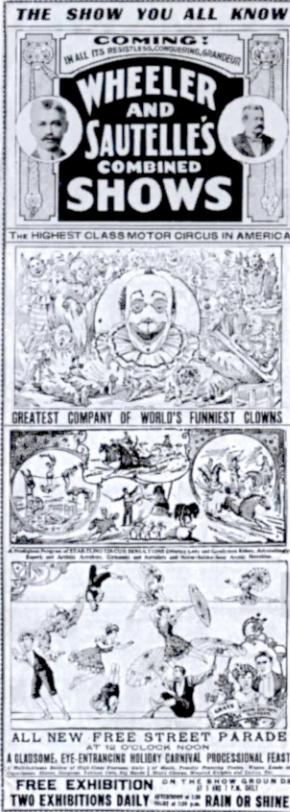
Wheeler & Sautelle opened the season at Petersburg, Virginia on April 30. Five additional stands in Virginia were followed by a single stand in Maryland. The circus entered Pennsylvania at Oxford on May 9 and played five stands in that state.

The May 14 *Billboard* carried a short piece on the show opening. It reported it was nicely painted and that the canvas and stock was in good condition. The matinee was fair, but the night performance was filled. Among the performers were singer Lillian Carver, the Damm brothers, Carl Clark's pigs, and the Coriell family. Two features were the Damm brothers on rings, with the younger member doing a back som-

ersault from the ground to a toe catch and a head slide by Vern Coriell. Texas Lewis and his troupe provided the wild west after show. Jack Phillips had a small band. Frank Goldie had the side show, which did fair business. Harris and Jaraus operated a pit show.

Herald used by the circus in 1931 and 1932. Pfening Archives.

A letter to the editor in the June *White Tops* from C F. Lauterbach Jr. told of the Wheeler & Sautelle opening: "The day was an ideal circus day, the weather was warm, the sun was shining. Everything was in nice shape with all of the trucks freshly painted. It made a pretty picture on the lot."



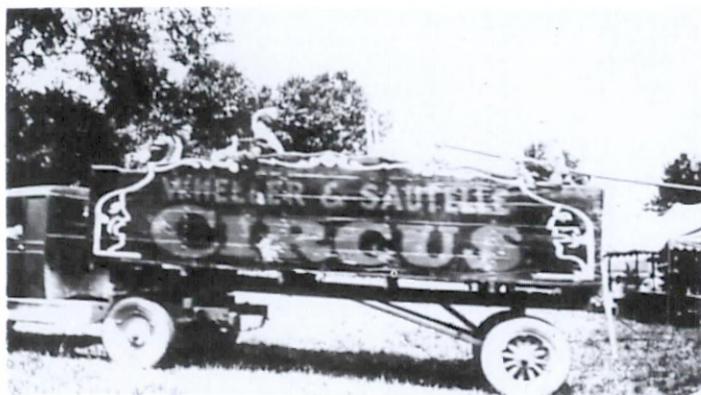
All the early reports seemed to ignore the physical characteristics of the show. The big top was probably the same size as the year before, a 70 with three 30s and the side show, which also housed the menagerie, a 60 with three 30s.

News about the No. 2 show appeared in the May 31 *Billboard*. The Al F. Wheeler and Tiger Bill's Wild West Combined opened in Gaithersburg, Maryland on May 14. At Donaldson, Virginia all the extra seats were used and straw was placed around the tent. The show offered a spirited and excellent circus program presented in two rings, opening with a patriotic bicentennial spec. The band led by Jack Erwin was reported to be very good.

"The performance, under the direction of Leo Snyder, who is also manager, embraces Vernon West Duo, in acrobatic feats on slack wire, as well

Texas Ted Lewis and his stock in the backyard. Circus World Museum collection.





A bandwagon with the side show band on board ready for a parade. Circus World Museum collection.

as juggling novelties; Sanford's dogs and ponies; and the Silverlake family in aerial numbers. M. L. Kirtley is assistant manager, legal adjuster, and also makes announcements.

"Concert is all wild west and was liberally patronized. The side show is under direction of George Gregory."

Wheeler & Sautelle moved into New Jersey on May 16 at Flemington and after three more dates in the state headed into New York for four more enroute to Connecticut with initial stand at Ridgefield on May 25. The circus was back in New York for a lengthily tour starting at Katonah on June 6.

The May 21 *Billboard* reported: "The performance is presented in three rings. The admissions has been reduced to 25 and 35 cents.

"The Coriell family presented a featured acrobatic number. Coriell Sr. not only clowns at the start of the performance, but does a remarkable head slide on a wire at the conclusion.

"The show boasts that it is the only motorized circus in America carrying a flying act, presented by the Damm brothers. Carl Clark's dogs and pigs add much to the child appeal.

A semi-trailer carrying Texas Ted's steers. Circus World Museum collection.



"The show is managed by Al F. Wheeler and is routed to country where the Wheeler and Sautelle names have been known for a quarter century."

Wheeler & Sautelle advertised in the same issue wanting a side show manager and new featured acts. A week or so later it advertised for a banner solicitor, a strong cornet player, fiddler and saxophone player.

Recent events on the show were covered in the June 18 *Billboard*: "After a run of ten days in Connecticut, during which the show enjoyed very satisfactory business, Wheeler & Sautelle returned to New York state. While matinees were light at several stands, night houses were near capacity in all of the larger towns. Program under direction of Dennison Berkery is running without a hitch. Very liberal after notices have been accorded show by the press. Jack Phillips' band is giving a classy musical program and Texas Ted Lewis wild west concert is sending them out pleased.

"Among the acts meeting with favor are the Coriell family, Brothers Damm, LaBelle & Roy, Carver brothers, Clark's animals, the Coleys, Great LaVern, Lillian Rudisall and Viola Burrell. In clown alley are the Carver brothers, Levi Phillips, Hoyle Coley, Arthur Brewer, Mervyn Ray and Fred Alward.

"Frank Goldie's annex attractions include Tommy Olsen's Old Time Fiddlers; Belmont's Bird Circus; Mme Rudy, mentalist; Ruth Coley, sword box; Phil Levy's Jazz band; Goldie's magic and ventriloquism; and six cages of wild animals.

"Harris and Jaraus No. 2 annex has a fine collection of freak animals and large exhibit of reptiles.

"Several additions are soon to be made to the big show program and Jack Phillips' band will be enlarged to 14 pieces

Truck No. 14 carrying goats in a Wheeler & Sautelle parade. Circus World Museum collection.

for the New England fair engagements during August and September."

The Texas Ted Lewis concert personnel were listed in June 19 *Billboard*: Lewis and Ted Burgess, bronk riders; T. P. Lewis, Everett Coriell, Dorothy Lewis and Ted Burgess, ropers; Jerry Burroughs, horse roper; Art Sanders, trick rider; Walter Hohn, comedy mule act and bucking steer; and Viola Burroughs, whip act.

A new side show/menagerie top, a 60 with two 40s, was added at Avon, New York on June 28. Sanford's trained dog and pony acts had been added to the big show performance.

A new advance truck was added at LeRoy, New York. E. B. Walker and a crew of billers would handle the billing of the fair dates starting in early August.

When the show played Albion, New York on July 1, members journeyed to the grave of Andrew Downie in Kedina. Circus chaplain E. Parke Brown conducted a memorial service for Wheeler's former partner. Jack Phillips' band played during the service. Mrs. Downie and several relatives were in attendance.

The show advertised in the July 23 *Billboard* for versatile teams and trios to augment the show for fairs. A side show manager, candy butchers and a band leader and musicians were wanted for the No. 2 show. A number of New York stands were listed for response.

During the depths of the depression many motorized shows used the so called "merchants ticket plan," where coupons could be secured at participating stores or newspapers for purchase of circus tickets. Somehave claimed the plan was the savior of the small motorized show during the early 1930s.

So far Wheeler & Sautelle had not joined most other motorized outfits in

adopting a merchant's ticket plan. Wheeler's thoughts on this were explained in the July 30 *Billboard*: "While the general admission price of Wheeler & Sautelle has been reduced to 25 and 35 cents, which price is featured on all billing, the show has not resorted to the sale of merchants tickets or any of the other methods of price reduction," informs Al F. Wheeler. 'Twenty-five cents is charged for side show, the same as in past seasons and the same for the wild west concert.'

"It is my firm conviction," states Mr. Wheeler, "that any drastic reduction in admission prices at this time will only prove a boomerang that will slap back in the future to the detriment of those who are using such methods to entice trade. Our policy this season has been to coax the public by giving them a little more for their money, sending them out pleased in the afternoon and the fact that our night houses have been very good at nearly all stands is proof enough for us that our policy is correct. Let us not forget that there are more seasons to come and not to do anything that will tend to hurt the business in the future."

A total of 44 stands were played in New York before the circus went into Pennsylvania at Honesdale on July 27.

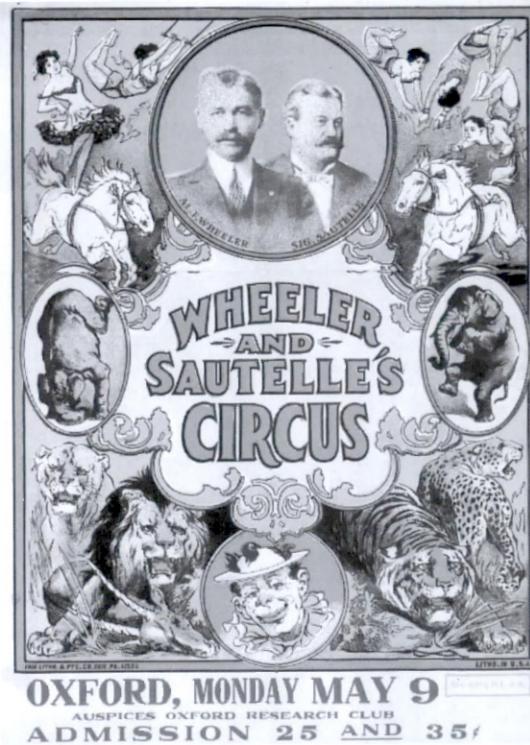
The towns played July 28 through August 1 are somewhat confused. Supposedly booked were New York towns of Lake Huntington, Livingston Manor, Downaville, and Ballston Spa, but some sources said the show may have instead barnstormed (wildcatted) during this time. The circus was in Fort Edward, New York on August 2. Two days later it went into Vermont at Manchester Center. A three day fair in Morrisville, a two day fair at Sheldon Springs, and a three day fair in Woodstock were played.

The August 23 *Billboard* reported that with ideal weather business for Wheeler & Sautelle had been very satisfactory. Robilliard, a circus decorator, arrived at Manchester, Vermont and with several assistants gave the rolling equipment its midsummer coat of paint.

Kenneth Van was on hand at Fort Edward, New York, bringing with him a truck load of new poles and stakes for the several fair visits. Van had furnished poles for Wheeler for the past 28 years.

A Wheeler ad in the same *Billboard* wanted a small wild west unit with own transportation for a string of New England fairs starting the week of August 22.

The circus received a new banner



Full color courier printed by Erie for Wheeler & Sautelle in 1932. Pfening Archives.

front for the annex at Morrisville. The Simpsons joined the show after the closing of Snyder Bros. Circus. Their knife throwing act was featured in the side show.

The Wheeler outfit moved into Massachusetts on August 30 at Williamstown and the next day played the Great Barrington fair for three days. A tour of New Hampshire followed, starting with a single date at Winchester which was followed by the fair at Lancaster September 5-7. Three more dates in the state followed. It then went into Maine at Fryeburg on September 12. The fair at South Paris was played the following three days. A single stand at Limerick concluded the Maine tour. Two dates were played in New Hampshire, four in Rhode Island, and six in Connecticut, the final coming at Bristol on October 1, which concluded the late season tour of New England.

An ad in the September 10 *Billboard* offered the show for sale. It read: "For Sale. Wheeler & Sautelle Circus. The finest equipped and most successful motorized show in the East. Complete in every detail, with fine lot of animals and trained stock. No incumbencies. To a recognized showman, part can remain on time. If you mean business wire and come see it in operation. Want. Versatile aerial performers and others. Join on wire."

After leaving Connecticut the show

moved into New Jersey, playing Ridewood. The season closed the next day at Frenchtown on October 4. The show moved into new winter quarters at Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The October 22 *Billboard* told the story of the new quarters in an article dated Lancaster, Pennsylvania, October 15: "Representing the Eastern Circus Corporation, F. J. Frink closed a lease for the fairgrounds here to be used as winter quarters for the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus and other units of that company which will furnish attractions for indoor events during the winter."

The main exhibition building, a structure 100 by 225, will be fitted up for presenting indoor events during winter, while other buildings will be used to house equipment and animals of the show. All buildings are electric lighted and will have running water and are of steel and concrete construction."

After the circus was stored in Lancaster Jethro Almond returned to his home in Albermarle, North Carolina. C. E. Springer, superintendent and Joe F. Almond, general agent, also wintered there. Al F. Wheeler remained in Lancaster.

The Wheeler outfit furnished a number of attractions in October for the Joyland Circus, managed by Harry Hunt, in Philadelphia.

The final news in 1932 appeared in the December 3 *Billboard*: "Due to the many other activities of the Eastern Circus Corporation at this time no work has yet started, but after the first of the year work will start on the Wheeler & Sautelle Circus. Many additions and improvements are to be made in the rolling equipment, including another new advance truck, a new prop truck and several new cage bodies are to be built."

"Superintendent C. E. Springer is busy at the old quarters in Albermarle, North Carolina working on several labor saving devices that will be put in operation. Among these will be a powerful portable windless to be used raising the poles and peaks of the larger tents and also moving trucks from bad lots."

"The menagerie will be considerable augmented and a menagerie top will be used in front of the big top. Very few changes will be made in the personnel of the staff and advance forces."

Nothing further was mentioned about the Wheeler-Tiger Bill outfit. It is assumed that it also went into the Lancaster quarters.

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1926

On March 1 Christy bought three 50 foot flat cars from the Mt. Vernon Car Company, paying \$6,900.

The March 13 *Billboard* reported: "Beaumont, Texas, March 5. Everything is practically ready for the opening of the Christy Bros.' Shows. The mechanical department, under the supervision of 'Hank' Ellis, has done both rapid and commendable work, and up to date has turned out repair work on 65 wagons, has built eight new cages and baggage wagons and a new calliope and ticket wagon. The past week the paint crew has been busy on the cars and the train is now ready for the road. Cash and Biddle, who will have the privilege car, have brought on their own equipment and electric lighting plant.

"The three highlights in the street parade, the mammoth new band tableau America, the second band wagon Asia and the new white and gold beauty wagon have been completed and were placed on exhibition at the fair park last Sunday. The new parade wardrobe is going to create a lot of surprise to those who have seen the Christy parade in past years.

"Everything is new from the caparisons to the band uniforms for the five bands. There will be 10 horses on each of the band wagons, those drawing America wearing new harness and trappings of red, white and blue. Two car loads of horses were received the past week and the show will now have 80 head of baggage stock and two big trucks, as well as 45 ponies, split up into teams of four and six each. Indians and cowboys will form a special section of the parade and there will be 45 mounted ladies in another section.

"The new steel-flats have been received from the shops and this gives the show a solid train of steel equipment. Gold leaf has been used almost exclusively on all of the parade wagons. The same spec as last season, Noah and the Ark, will be used, but it has been materially changed. Merritt Belew has the program well in hand and all of the equine acts ready. He has been assisted by Joe Stokes and Frank Leonardi who is back home again after a season with the 101 Ranch Show. He will again present his trained reindeer.

"The big show will open and close with big special numbers; the old hunting scene being done away with. In its place is a big riding number participated in by 48 riders. Rodney Harris will have the band and an air calliope and Ella Harris will again be prima donna.

# CHRISTY and His WONDER SHOW

## Part Three

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

The show has all new canvas and the seating capacity has been increased. Practically the same officials and heads of departments will be found with the show from Bowman Robinson, looking after the front as assistant manager, down the line to the dressing room and stake and chain wagon. The writer, Fletcher Smith, will again be in charge of the front door, with his side partner, Harry P. Kutz, as assistant. A cordial invitation is extended by Mr. Christy to all members of the Circus Fans' Association to be the guests of the show. Henry Emgard will have the side show again, with Walter Hodgedon on the front door and Prof. Deu with his band furnishing the ballyhoo. Clarence (Red) Sheldon will again have charge of the concessions, and Ray O'Wesney reserved seats. Jack Fenton, banner solicitor, has already beaten all past records for the opening here."

An inventory of the Christy circus was taken in July of 1926. It included: a 110 foot big top with three 40 foot and two 30 foot middles; eight 39 foot center poles, 36 twenty-two foot quarter poles; 232 reserved seat foot rests; one 30 by 30 foot marquee; a 40 foot menagerie top with four 30 foot middles; a 30 by 60 foot dressing top with two 24 foot middles; a fifty foot side show top with two 30 foot middles; eleven 10 by 18 banners; a 40 by 20 foot pit show top; a 10 by 16 foot candy stand top; a 30 by 60 foot push pole baggage stock tent; and a 30 by 30 marquee; 41 high school horses; 50 baggage stock horses; 1 saddle horse; seven miniature cages; five

miniature tableau wagons; two cross cages; one air calliope wagon, one steam calliope wagon; five large tableau wagons; one dog wagon; one trappings wagon; two cage dens; one menagerie wagon; one property wagon; two plank wagons; one big top pole wagon; one stringer wagon; one stake and chain wagon; one big top canvas wagon; one unidentified wagon; one jack wagon; one cookhouse wagon; one stable wagon; one water wagon; one Mack truck; one generator wagon; two chariots; one ox cart; two ticket wagons.

Six 70 foot steel flat cars, one 70 foot wood flat, one 60 foot wooden flat, four 65 foot wooden stock cars, five 75 foot wooden coaches, one 70 foot steel stock car, one 80 foot tunnel car and one 72 foot advance car.

Nine elephants, Cardenia Babe, Alice, Daisy, Rosie, Cocoa, Bessie, Dixie, Myrtle, and Venice; 8 male lions; 7 female lions; 2 tigers; 6 leopards; 8 black bears; 2 zebras; 1 hybrid zebra; 18 goats; 3 sheep; 16 dogs; 7 chickens; 6 geese; 5 elks; 6 monkeys; 3 baboons; 4 llamas; 7 camels; 1 turkey; 2 coyotes; 1 vulture; 1 stork; 6 cocotoos; 2 buffalos; 2 water buffalos; 1 sacred cow; 2 yaks; 8 pigs; 1 kinkijod; 1 civit cat; 1 ant bear; 2 baby lions; and 3 great dane dogs.

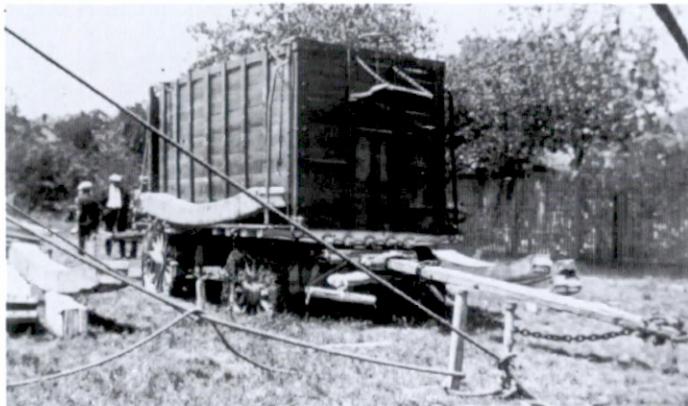
Using information from the Dave Price, Bill Woodcock and Chang Reynolds elephant files this history of the Christy bulls was compiled.

Christy's first elephant was Cardenia Babe, bought from Mugivan and Bowers in 1919. She had been on John Robinson.

Alice (Bughouse or Barnum Alice) and another Babe was bought from Mugivan and Bowers for the 1923 Christy tour. Since there was already a Babe on the show the name was changed to Nero. They had been on Gollmar Bros. in 1922. The second

The Christy Bros. Circus on a lot in 1926. Pfening Archives.





The Christy Bros. ring curb wagon in 1926. Ed Tracy collection.

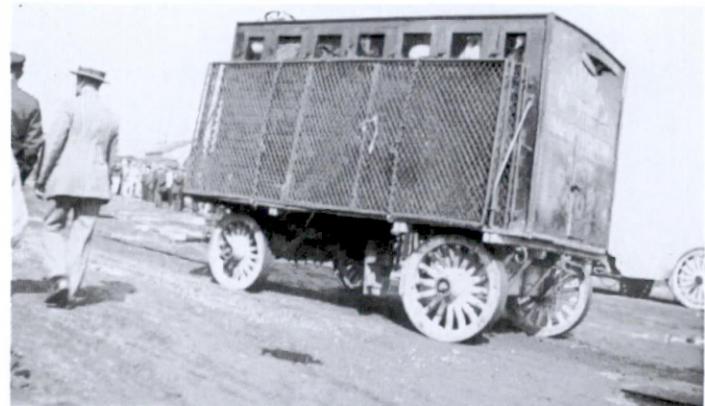
Babe was renamed Nero and remained on the show through the 1925 season. It is thought that she died in winter quarters.

Gentry Babe and Daisy were bought from James Patterson in November of 1924. Gentry Babe was on Lee Bros. in 1926 and 1926, then returned to Christy through the 1932 season. She was sold to Sam B. Dill in 1933, who changed her name to Sahara. From 1934 to 1938 she was on the Tom Mix Circus. From 1939 to 1942 she was owned by Bud Anderson and was then to Atterbury Bros. 1941 to 1943, then to Arthur Bros. 1944 and 1945, Seal Bros. 1946 to 1950, Wallace & Clark 1951 to 1953, Pan American Carnival 1953 and 1954 and Gene Holter 1955 to 1966. She died at age 69 in April 1967.

Daisy was leased to Barnett Bros. in 1931, to Harrington Nickel Plate in 1933, to Harley Sadler's Bailey Bros. in 1935 and was sold to Russell Bros. in 1941. Daisy was sold to Kelly-Miller and then to Circo Union in Mexico.

Rosie and Rubber came to Christy when he bought the Golden show in 1924. Rosie later died in the Christy winter quarters in 1928. Rubber was on Lee Bros. in 1925 and 1926. It is thought that she was sold to William P. Hall who in turn sold her to Russell Bros. in 1928.

In 1925 Dixie and Myrtle were on Christy, coming from an unknown source. In 1931 they were leased to Barnett Bros. and in 1935 they were leased to Harley Sadler's Bailey Bros. Dixie, Myrtle and Daisy were the last elephants owned by Christy. They performed with his fair unit through the 1942 season. In 1943 they were sold to Russell Bros. Dixie died on that circus in 1954. Myrtle was later on Clark & Walters as late as 1968.



The Christy dog wagon with mesh screening on sides for the backyard dog pen in 1926. Ed Tracy collection.

Venice was added to the show as a baby in the spring of 1925. She remained on the circus through the 1930 season. Venice was sold to Barnett Bros. in 1931 and died there the same year.

Bessie and Coco were bought from the Ringling-Barnum in Bridgeport for the 1926 Christy show. These were sold in 1932 to an unknown buyer.

Christy wrote: "In 1926 I opened the Christy Bros. Big Five Ring Wild Animal Circus and had a slogan painted on the back of each wagon, 'The Wonder Show' [This appears to be the only title to have been painted on Christy baggage wagons during the entire life of the show].

"On opening day in Beaumont we gave a mile long parade with 28 cages of wild animals, five bands, two callopes and about fifty head of mounted horses, 14 camels, 12 elephants. We had a children's section of miniature cage wagons filled with small animals, all drawn by Shetland ponies. There were a number of tableau wagons I had purchased from Charles Ringling. . . .

"This particular year we used as always a six pole big top with five rings including two complete steel arenas for the opening wild animal acts. They were later torn down to make the entire five rings available for the balance

The light plant wagon with "The Wonder Show" painted on back in 1926. Circus World Museum collection.



of the performance. The back side, along the back door, connected to the pad room. A huge scenic set of Noah's Ark was erected there also. All of the menagerie animals for the spec were led in through the scenery. The spectacular Noah's Ark pageant included about 300 people, five prima donnas, many natives playing Tom Toms, girls playing harps, robed men playing bells, others carrying spears. All this started the show on its tour of 1926.

"The menagerie was a unique innovation in circus history. It was as long as the big top. This canopy was crammed with the 28 cages of animals. There was a long string of steel pens in the center containing ostriches, a yak, guanacos, llamas, storks, emus and sacred cattle. We had a string of 14 camels and 9 elephants and about 85 performing horses and ponies. There was much to see.

"We showed Lorain, Ohio on May 19, 1926. It was a beautiful day, a very large crowd at both performances. But at the show a very cold rain came up. We always used the elephants to help take the tents down and to push wagons through the mud using big Alice, one of the largest elephants in America at the time and at the runs. That was until all was loaded. Then the trainer who worked her took her to the elephant car to load. By then she was

so sick, with a thorough chill and fever from the cold rain, we could not load her. I had always used whiskey and quinine for an elephant chill. I quickly called for whiskey. However we were in a dry county and it was not possible to get any booze. However, realizing that the sheriff of most counties usually had some that they had confiscated, I sent for the sheriff. He said he did not have a drop. I knew a



Five of the cages built in 1924 on a wooden flat in 1926. Ed Tracy collection.

bootlegger about twelve miles away who might have some. I quickly sent a man there and he returned with a gallon of 100 proof pure alcohol. I poured it in a bucket with five pounds of sugar and a big helping of quinine and heated the mixture luke warm. Alice said that's fine and gulped the whole thing. Then I plastered her legs with a mustard mixture up to her belly and started walking her. In about five minutes old Alice's chills were gone, and she was drunk as any old alcoholic ever was, slapping her trunk on the ground squealing and quite wobbly. This made it impossible to load her in the car. So we kept walking her about an hour until the jag wore off. And away we went arriving in the next town late the next morning."

The July 17 *Billboard* reported a fierce south-western gale raged all day in Plymouth, Massachusetts on June 29. It caused considerable damage to the big top and menagerie, but both stayed up. The menagerie continued to be enlarged. Two more elephants (Bessie and Coco) were added in 1926 from Ringling-Barnum, together with two rare specimens of buffalo from Tibet. The 101 Ranch Wild West was only fourteen miles away and visits were exchanged. The circus played everything on Cape Cod going as far as Provincetown.

Large downtown Christy billstand in Chattanooga, Tennessee for the August 30 date. Pfening Archives.



Christy played Newport, Kentucky on August 19. The following day this after blast appear in the local paper: "Barnum was right. And being a circus man he should have known what he was talking about. Attaches of the Christy Bros. Circus figured as Barnum did. Three Card Monte hazard and other games of skill were staged openly without apparently fear of police. Instead of a wild animal show one obtained the impression that on the grounds a new hazard was being opened . . . under the eyes of Newport's police the men . . . in the side show, the operator staged his game under an umbrella, and did a land office business . . . wheels of fortune also operated on the grounds with the sky the limit. For the cost of 25 cents in the side show the dancing girls kicked . . . whether the dancing girl's show is immoral is debatable. However similar dancing girls have been banded in Newport at other times. The reserved seats were not numbered, seats sold for another 50 cents. Men selling the tickets made a number of customers upset with their seats. The same mistakes in change had also been made."

Bad luck hit Christy in August. The September 4 *Billboard* reported: "The Christy Bros. Circus train, which was in a wreck at Loretto, Alabama on Au-

gust 27, is fast being put into shape again. The last of the damaged cars reached Florence early this morning. The L. & N. sent a special train of flats and box cars to bring the horses and elephants to Florence.

"Every car was damaged with the exception of the steel flats and the sleepers. The cars were taken to the Southern yards at Sheffield and a force of men put at work to make the repairs so that the train can leave here sometime Sunday to make the 170 mile jump to Chattanooga and show there Monday. The circus passed up Huntsville, Alabama, but gave a parade in Florence and had two good crowds. A colored man was found in the tunnel car with an arm broke, and was sent to the hospital. Two cages were badly smashed but not animals were injured.

"The wreck on the Christy show train occurred in Loretto at about 6 a.



The Christy Bros. train wreck in Loretto, Alabama on August 27, 1926. Circus World Museum collection.

m., when the train ran into the rear end of a local freight. There was dense fog and the crew of the freight, not expecting the circus train, had no flag man out. The two engines crashed through the caboose, smashing it to kindling, and ploughed through two freight cars and derailing six cars, including an oil car and a car loaded with gasoline. The car next to the first engine caught fire, but a bucket brigade subdued the flames before they reached the tank car.

"The engineer of the first engine, with his fireman, jumped when they saw that the collision was inevitable. They were only slightly injured. Had the crew of the freight been in the caboose, all would have been killed. Both the northbound and the southbound tracks were blocked with the wreckage and the track torn up for a hundred yards.

"It was just luck that, in making up the train in Columbia, the steel flats

were placed next to the engines and the stock cars with horses and elephants were placed next to the coaches. Nearly everyone on the circus train was seriously shaken up. The cookhouse wagon had its front wheels demolished, but Jack Walsh set the tables up by the side of the track and meals were cooked in the wagon on the flat and served to the people in good time. W. A. Dyke, harness maker with the show, was thrown from his bunk and had a bad gash cut in his head. Dyke and the black helper were the only ones seriously injured.

"The worst damage was done to the wagons on the wooden flats, which were jammed together and all of the draw bars smashed. The stock cars had all of the trucks damaged and there was not an inch of room between them. It was learned around noon that the wrecker was at work on another accident, so G. W. Christy took charge of the work and under his direction the track was cleared in about three hours. A train was made up of five sleepers, one stock and three freight cars, and sent through to Florence, arriving about 5:50 p.m. An immense crowd, having heard of the wreck was on hand to greet the train. No effort was made to give a performance."

Christy had these memories of the wreck: "Our train was ambling along in the early morning. Most of the personnel was still asleep. Just before daylight as we were passing by the depot in Loretto, Alabama, bang, a sudden jamming and screeching of brakes. Circus folks were thrown out of their berths. The train had smashed into the rear of a freight train directly in front of the railroad station.

"Immediately there was some indication of a small fire starting in the wreckage. Seven of our cars were demolished, much track was torn up. I immediately ordered the elephants unloaded and harnessed so that in the event there would be a fire I would be ready to move. And I did move all our coaches back away from the train, by elephant power. I then ordered the mess tent be erected along the tracks so we could feed our people.

"By then I had contacted the railroad agent asking him to call a wrecker crew. The answer came back that no wrecker could be obtained for twelve hours. I then called for the section boss and asked if he could



A packed midway on Christy Bros. Circus. Circus World Museum collection.

locate rails and fix the track if I cleared the wreckage. He, of course, quickly said 'how you going to do that.' In well established circus tradition I replied, we will clear it if you get the rails. There was steep bank off the side of that depot down which some of the cars crashed. Others were cross wise of the roadbed, blocking it. I ordered all live stock unloaded and fed and some eight horse teams hitched with long chains attached. We placed three elephants along side the smashed freight cars. We rocked them and sent over that bank off the right of way. We placed a long chain over the tank car which was loaded. We hooked eight horses to the other end. This we call a rolling hitch. Then three elephants with their heads down along side the tank car and moved it out of the way. Several other cars were cleared in the same way. But about ten cars had their draw bars pulled out or were badly damaged. The question was how could we move them. Well, the same tradition of the circus came forth. The show must go on. We had lots of those long hook rope chains and cable. So we started chaining the cars together best we

Baggage stock being unloaded from one of the new steel stock cars. Pfening Archives.



could. By the time the wrecker arrived we were ready to move.

"I sent a man to Florence to spread the word we would show that night and to locate a show ground lot close by the railroad. Which he did. We limped into Florence arriving after dark. But again I said the show must go on. We started unloading and had proceeded right away having already driven stakes. But alas, that old tradition got me down. We were all so exhausted from all that wreck clearing. I finally gave orders to stop any further erecting of the big top. Meanwhile there was some luck with us even at that. First, no one was injured. Number two, Florence was a division point and they had repair shops. We started immediately to make repairs to those cars that had only minor damage. By morning they were back in our train, excepting a number of our cars that had to stay for major surgery. These were replaced by L & N cars, which we used for a few days until they returned ours all repaired. We gave our entire performance the next day as though nothing ever happened. The show had to go on. It was all taken in stride and soon forgotten by us."

Christy received a bad notice following the September 1 stand in Bristol, Tennessee. The *Bristol News* stated: "The circus had wonderful and capable performers, but there was gambling and indecent dancing in the side show. The next day in Johnson City the lid was on. The lid was off in Chattanooga where there were reports of indecent dancing. Fayette County is a nice place to stage a circus. At least that is what Christy Bros. management thought as well as those who played the graft. Christy Bros. has the same side show and annexes. Gambling was open and the graft showed up in true form, Three Card Monte, the pick out game and . . .

the girls with same Oriental fantastic gesticulations that were inclined to make one sit up and take notice. It was a combination dance made up of the ancient Hootchie Kootchie, tango and the Charleston. This was danced by girls scantily attired to the weird strains of an oriental flute and drums. No carnival ever carried a bigger 'grafting' outfit than did the staffers with the Christy Bros. Circus. Nearly every peace officer had a surplus number of



An opening of the Christy Bros. side show in 1926. Circus World Museum collection.

the pasteboards. Police found \$5, \$10 and \$20 bills folded in among the passes."

The Christy circus was literally hit by lightning in September. The September 18 *Billboard* told the story: "Gadsden, Alabama, September 10. During a terrific thunderstorm about 10:30 Monday morning, lightning struck a high tension pole of the Alabama Power Company in the rear of the big top of the Christy Bros. Circus. A high-voltage wire burned off and fell across the show grounds in the rear of the side show and across the main street at Alabama City, where the show was exhibiting. A fuse was burned out at the power station, and word was sent to the electricians of the trouble, and they were instructed not to turn on the power. One of the company's electricians was sent to the show lot to remove the wire which had fallen across the pole of the first bandwagon which was standing hitched up, ready for the parade. The No. 2 bandwagon was a few feet away and the steam calliope fifty feet away. It was claimed that the man at the power station repaired the fuse, and, while the electrician was at work on the wire, turned on the power. There was a flash and an explosion, and a crowd of more than a thousand people, who were around the side show, had a miraculous escape from electrocution, as the electricity charged the wet ground for a distance of several hundred feet. The company electrician, James Doden, was instantly killed. Two little town girls were victims as well as two other town folks. The six horses on both the first and second bandwagon were killed, and after the first explosion and shock the horses on the cal-

lope were knocked down and stunned. One of the horses rolled away from the pole, and, although shocked, was able to regain his feet. A few minutes after the first shock there was another, and this time the three horses on the calliope were killed.

"Standing by the horses on the first bandwagon team were James E. Bowman, drummer of the big show, Ray O'Wesney and John Hoffman. Bowman was so badly shocked that

he was taken to the hospital here. The driver of the calliope, Charles Robinson, who was on his seat, was badly shocked, but recovered. The power was shut off soon after the accident, and Alabama City and Gadsden were in darkness Monday night. The show, though badly crippled, moved tonight, and new stock will be secured at once. It is not expected that any parades will be missed.

A side show colored canvasman was shocked, but recovered later at the hospital. The ambulances of both cities were soon on the spot and removed the injured. Two were dead before their arrival and the other three died later at the hospital. The side show tent canvas was charged with electricity, and Bert Larow, who started to lift up the side wall, was hurled a distance of 15 feet, but was not seriously injured. Thousands of people gathered, but the show did only a fair business, as the accident put a damper on the crowd.

"Earl Grozer, fireman of the calliope, was in the rear end and had his left leg paralyzed for a time and was slightly shocked. Fletcher Smith was sitting at the keyboard, directly beneath the driver but fortunately was on a wooden seat and escaped injury. Charles Russell, one of the parade marshals, was

Six dead horses in front of the Asia bandwagon in Gadsden, Alabama. Pfenning Archives.



driving by on his horse at the time of the first shock. He was thrown off and shocked and the pony hurled across the street. Officials of the power company were early on the scene, and it is probable that there will be an early settlement of all damages.

"Word from the hospital late Monday stated that Bowman had his spine injured and one leg is paralyzed from the hip down. It will be some time before he can rejoin the show. It was stated also that the electrician who turned on the power had been arrested on a charge of manslaughter, and released on \$6,000 bail."

Christy remembered: "We played Cuthbert, Georgia on September 24. A nice group filled the big top at the afternoon performance. One of our customers was a young attorney who was about to be married in a few days. He and his bride to be occupied seats right in the very front row of the reserves. The crowd was eating the show up. Every one was having a great time, all the numbers got great applause. Then came the the big menage number with some twenty-five dancing horses ridden by ladies. At one point a fine fat Palomino horse did an exceptionally vigorous hula dance. But as this horse was passing in front of the section where the young attorney and his young lady sat the horse's bowels moved. In switching its tail during the dance it flicked a tiny spec of bowel movement in the lap of this bride to be. We had a law suit. They claimed that everyone in that five ring tent laughed at the bride because of the incident. In reality they did laugh as they did every day at that dance. There is no doubt not more than several people sitting next to those folks ever noticed the incident. But I fought the case through the supreme court in Atlanta. But I finally lost anyway. Today you can see the case record in your attorney's office anywhere in the United States as a precedent case. You can hardly win anything with a circus."

The *South Eastern [law] Reporter* published an official record of the suit:

"Christy Bros. Circus v. Turnage, (No. 18431). Court of Appeals of Georgia, Division No. 2, September 15, 1928.

"1. Damages for mental suffering, humiliation, or embarrassment resulting from physical injury, of which they are inseparable components, may be recovered.

"2. Damages. Unlawful touching of person's body, although no physical hurt en-

sues therefrom, constitutes 'physical injury' to person...

"5. Theaters and shows-Petition, alleging that a horse ridden by defendant's servant in circus was backed toward plaintiff sitting as guest in circus, and evacuated his bowels into her lap in full view of many people, some of whom were defendant's employees, and all of whom laughed at occurrence, and that as a result thereof plaintiff was caused embarrassment and mental pain and suffering to her damage in certain amount, stated good cause of action as against general demurrer.

"6. Appeal and error. Allowance of amendment to attached increasing damages, if error, was harmless, where recovery was not greater than amount in affidavit...

"8. Trial-Failure to require plaintiff to use care in avoiding consequences of defendant's negligence held not in error, where court required plaintiff to use care and instruction was not requested...

"10. Damages-\$500 damages for humiliation, suffered by guest at circus when horse evacuated bowels in her lap, held authorized."

The fall route took the circus through Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana. It returned to Texas at Center on November 4 and closed in Goose Creek, Texas on November 26. Christy Bros. went into winter quarters in Houston. The total mileage for the season was 12,744 miles.

Bowman S. Robinson, Christy Bros. assistant manager and legal adjuster, died on October 28, at age fifty. He had taken ill at Lake Providence, Louisiana on October 24. He had been with the show for five years.

At the end of December Christy moved his quarters from Beaumont to Houston.

Christy advertised a 3 car circus for sale at the end of the year. This was the baggage car show he had toured in 1921 and for a short time as the Texas Ranch Wild West in 1925.

#### Lee Bros. Circus 1926

Christy brought some new bosses to the Lee operation for the 1926 tour. John E. "Doc" Ogden was signed as side show manager. Max Fletcher was hired to manage the advance car. Meyer Schlaum returned as contracting agent to work under the direction of Bert Rutherford. Terrell Jacobs returned as superintendent of animals and to present a bear act and an eight lion act.

The staff included: Louis B. Chase, manager; Joseph McCollum, treasurer; Bert Rutherford, general agent and

railroad contractor; Frank O'Donnell, special agent; Sam M. Dawson, press agent; J. E. "Doc" Ogden, side show manager; Bert Dennis, equestrian director; Everett James, musical director; L. L. Brickner, superintendent of canvas; William Hartman, superintendent of commissary department; William Day, superintendent of side show canvas; Terrell Jacobs, superintendent of animals; Eugene "Arky" Scott, elephant boss; Carl Ossie, boss carpenter; Max Fletcher, advance car manager; Bert Talifero, checker-up; and Gordon Calvit and J. C. Ryan, legal adjusters.

The April 24 *Billboard* reviewed the performance: "The Lee Bros. Four Ring Wild Animal Circus opened its season April 3 at Port Arthur, Texas and had good business. The weather was ideal and many people saw the parade. The initial performance went over very smoothly and the many novel acts received plenty of applause.

The program began with a spectacular performance of Cinderella in Jungleland and the three rings and hippodrome track were filled with performers and others bedecked in glittering costumes. More than 100 people took part.

This was followed by pony drills by Bert Dennis and Jim McCloud; bear act by Capt. Terrell M. Jacobs; Mrs. James, perch; Harry James, contortionist; Bobbie, Lois, June, Flo, Polly, Katheenie Wande, and Little Bit Lenhart on swinging ladders; riding dogs, introduced by Gertrude Dennis and Bobbie Todd; Charles Robinson with the dancing lions; clowns; elephants and ponies worked by June Johnson, and elephants and dogs by Flo Buckner; riding goat acts, Wanda Hunt, and Bobbie Todd working a riding lion; Miss Hale Jacobs; posing horses and ponies by

The Lee Bros. Circus train rounding a curve in 1926. Pfening Archives.

Gertrude Dennis, Flo Buckner, June Johnson, Vonnie Orman and Lois LaBelle; clown number; Katheenie Healy, Little Bit Lenhart on swinging ladders; riding dogs, introduced by Gertrude Dennis and Bobbie Todd and Charles Robinson with the dancing lions; clowns; elephants and ponies worked by June Johnson, and elephants and dogs by Flo Buckner; riding goat acts, Wanda Hunt and Bobbie Todd, and riding lion, Miss Hale Jacobs; posing horses and ponies by Gertrude Dennis, Flo Buckner, June Johnson, Vonnie Orman and Lois LaBelle; clown number; Katheenie Healy, Little Bit Lenhart, Mrs. Everett James and Belle Engles, iron jaw number; performing dogs worked by Bobbie Todd and Flo Buckner; high-diving dogs, J. Haley and Russell Bell; riding goats, Jim Thomas; leaping hounds, Bert Dennis; clown number, introducing the dancing dummy; camels, James Haley; elephants, June Johnson; jumping mules, Bert Dennis; tandem horses by Bobbie Todd, Gertrude Dennis, Lois LaBelle, Flo Buckner, Polly McCloud and Kaheenie Haley, and mixed group of cat animals, June Johnson; bird song, introduced by Mrs. Everett James; clown number; bucking mules, Bert Dennis and Russell Bell; leopards and pumas, presented by Bobbie Todd; eight felame lions, presented by Capt. T. M. Jacobs; big menage act; clown turn; English fox hunt, concluding with high jumping horses, Jess Coppinger riding Don, Marion Stanley in high jumping and June Johnson and Bobbie Todd in broad jumping.

"In the side show, managed by John E. (Doc) Ogden, are John Kelly, Punch, magic, and lecturer; Mme. Lorraine, mind reader; the Simpsons, impalement act; Delia Kelly, snake hypnotist; T. A. McLendon, tattooed man; Prof. Jordon, ventriloquist and illu-



sions; Naljie Linton, sword walker; Princess Helman, Grace Foster, Hazel Harney, Hawaiian dancers; Prof. W. J. Jackson's band and minstrels of twelve people; Edward Roskin and Jack Wilson, ticket sellers."

Following the opening on April 3, the circus went through Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri. It then cut through Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan.

After seven stands in Michigan Lee Bros. entered Canada on May 20, at Sarnia, Ontario for a lengthy tour, a total of 28 stands in Ontario alone. While there the show encountered some opposition from Sparks Circus in Owen Sound and North Bay.

Leaving Ontario the show entered Manitoba on June 22 at Selkirk and after five stands in the province proceeded to Saskatchewan for eight more. July 7 saw the show at Vegreville, Alberta and the Canadian tour was concluded with a stand at Lethbridge on July 14. Generally Canadian business was very good despite some bad weather at places. The tour in the western provinces saw considerable opposition from Elmer H. Jones' two car Cooper Bros. Circus, which was usually ahead of Lee. The 15 car Heritage Bros. Circus was also in the area. These shows had considerable grift and a lot of heat was generated in many towns. The grift on Lee Bros. was somewhat controlled by the Mounties in Ontario. However, in the western provinces it operated wide open.

Lee returned to the states with a stand at Sweetgrass, Montana on July 15. Business took a decided dip back in the homeland. The show proceeded through Montana and played a number of dates in the vicinity of the Idaho-Washington border and after a couple of stands in Oregon headed back into Idaho and then eastward through Wyoming.

Writing in the July 31 *Billboard* press agent Sam Dawson reported the show had eight profitable weeks in Canada and remarked that so far there had not been any hot weather. While in the Northwest Heritage Bros. was close by and much visiting took place between personnel of the two shows.

During the next few weeks there was little news of the show as it played stands in Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas. The August 14 *Billboard* did mention that the show had purchased a new tractor which would be a great help in moving wagons to and from the lot.

Unusual routing took the Lee outfit



Terrell Jacobs on Lee Bros. Circus in 1926. Pfening Archives.

back west through Colorado. It entered New Mexico at Raton on August 28. By September 4 it was back in Texas at Pecos where it stayed until September 25 when it played Sayre, Oklahoma. Lee stayed in Oklahoma until October 20. From October 21 to November 20 it continued to pick up additional Texas towns, closing in Freeport, Texas on November 20.

That was the end of the Lee Bros. title on a railroad circus. Christy claimed Louis Chase had left unpaid bills along the route and that he lost \$5,200 in 1925 and \$3,200 in 1926 on the show.

Actually Christy had made up his mind in the early fall to no longer operate two circuses. He learned that John Pluto had visited the Patterson carnival in September which led Christy to believe that Pluto was a potential buyer for the Lee show.

On October 20, 1926 he wrote Pluto: "Understand you desire to get back into the big circus business again. We are offering Lee Bros. 15 car show for sale, complete as a going enterprise. Also the complete three car show.

"However we have spent \$75,000 on Lee show since we bought it from you, so do not expect to get any figure anything like what we paid for the circus. There are all new baggage wagons with wide wheels, new tableau wagons and a lot of new cars.

"I will never operate two shows again. It is impossible to watch two at once and get results. However Lee had a big season and are still doing a good business. It will close November 20 at Freeport, Texas."

After hearing from Pluto Christy again wrote on December 10: "Yes you said it, show property is only worth what you can get for it when you are trying to sell it. But if you happen to own it at the right time it is just like a lot when they find oil on it. The value goes up fast. If you had bought the

show the day it closed before we spent a lot more money getting it into winter quarters, it would have been cheaper.

"However, we do not care to operate two shows and I announced that fact early in the spring that we would sell Lee Bros. after this season regardless of what it made. I am only interested in one and it was never my intention to operate the Golden show, only the balance of that first season, so as to get it into quarters. I wanted to add the animals and elephants to my show and sell the equipment to carnivals.

"I let myself get talked into putting it out again and went to spending money on it. Now it is a very good piece of property, has all new baggage wagons and three or four new band-wagons. If you really want to buy it for cash money I will sell it just as it runs this season, or will sell it with a few of the animals off or most any way. But I think it would be necessary for you to come and look at it and see what you wanted. Wardrobe and everything is loaded in wagons yet and will leave them that way for a week or so yet so everything is intact in case you really want to buy it.

"Their equestrian director and entire official organization is right here in Houston, you would have a good organization right off the bat and could establish quarters right here. Or we could load the train for you. But you will have to get busy as it is not for sale after I start repairing and painting it again. I have two parties figuring on the show, one has plenty of money, the other is trying to turn some land over first. The fellow from Pittsburgh is really very anxious to buy.

"The same two elephants go with it, a much better lion act, same trained horses, excepting there are four or five new ones added. The harness was rebuilt and a lot of it was bran (sic) new last winter. Lot (of) good wardrobe now . . . better seats . . . and twice as many of them.

"The three car show cars of course are valuable cars as they are equipped for fastest passenger service and are the longest cars in America (sic) and are especially built stronger than anything else used with a circus. Their trucks cost more than and sleeper with a circus . . . then too I can sell them very easily, was offered \$6,000 for the steel adv. car last winter, it is one of the three car show cars. And now since I come to think of it I could sell that car at any price as I sold the



The Christy tunnel car in the South Houston quarters during the winter of 1926-1927. Pfening Archives.

car I was thinking about using for adv.car in its place. But still have a bag-gage car that can be used for the three car show that has wide doors and I would sell this car for \$2,000. Bill Campbell just offered me his minstrel car for only \$9,000, he has it in Phila (sic) now. So you can see cars are not as cheap as they used to be. The Pullman Co. closed down on selling them."

Christy wired Pluto on December 20: "Ten cars with animals, fourteen horses, twelve ponies, lot of dogs, three camels, two elephants practically same as was, only greatly improved and lot money in new wagons, cars, etc. Good wardrobe, same size tents, more and better seats for quick deal forty-five thousand. Four other parties dickering. If you want come down. Have mileage here but none back."

#### 1927

When the Christy and Lee circuses returned to Houston they were placed in a large warehouse Christy had leased from a group of lawyers. The equipment had been there only a short time when the lawyers came to Christy and told him he would have to move it all. It seems that the Texas cotton market had fallen apart and there was great demand for warehouse facilities to store unsold cotton. The lawyers had received a better offer for the building and wanted to cancel their contract. After much wrangling the lawyers agreed to refund Christy's money and find a new location for the circus and pay the moving costs. Christy said he found a new location in South Houston and moved to it, but never received any money for moving from the lawyers. He then bought land and a building in South Houston. It was on the Galveston Boulevard and the Galveston Electric Line, one block from the G. N. and M. K. & T railroad

depot. He also bought an extra lot adjoining the quarters.

On January 18 Christy again wrote Pluto: "Well you still have a chance at Lee Bros. Show complete, if you want to buy it, price will go up in the spring. The advance car has a lot of paper on it ready to go.

"We are building a new winter quarters. will have a wonderful place when all buildings are finished. Working on the big training barn now."

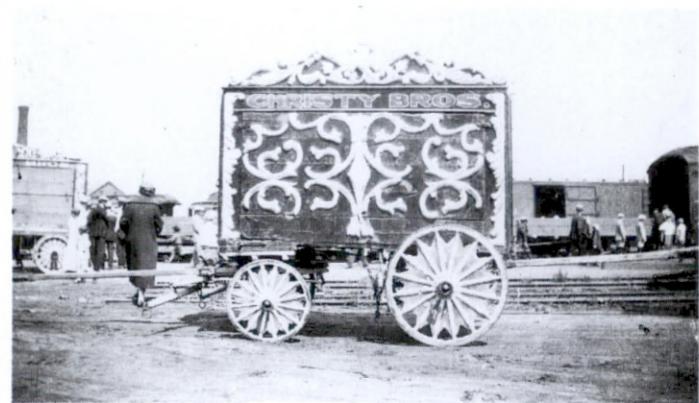
Pluto didn't bite and the Lee circus was never sold to him.

In 1927 George Washington Christy operated the largest circus of his career, twenty-five cars. He took the best equipment from Lee Bros. and added it to his namesake show. The train consisted of one advance car, six stock cars, eleven flats and seven coaches. Two of the coaches were pie cars, one for performers, managed by Cash Wiltzie, and the other for workmen, managed by Jimmie Woodward. In January he announced that Lee Bros. Circus would not tour in 1927.

Everett James returned to the show as bandmaster after two years on Lee Bros. Vernon (Slim) Walker, who had been on the Al G. Barnes Circus, was hired as elephant boss. Christy also brought a few of the better bosses to the mother ship. General agent Bert Rutherford booked a route that took the circus across the country to New England and a return to Texas through the Midwest.

By the first week of February work had started full blast in every department at the South Houston quarters. Late in January Christy purchased another building and the land adjoining the quarters and across the railroad. This was used as a paint shop.

Several flat cars, loaded with new pa-



One of the former Gentry pony cages at the runs in 1927. Ed Tracy collection.

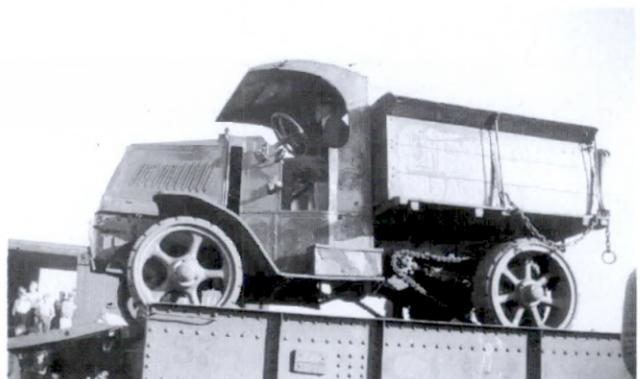
rade wagons, were on their way from Bridgeport.

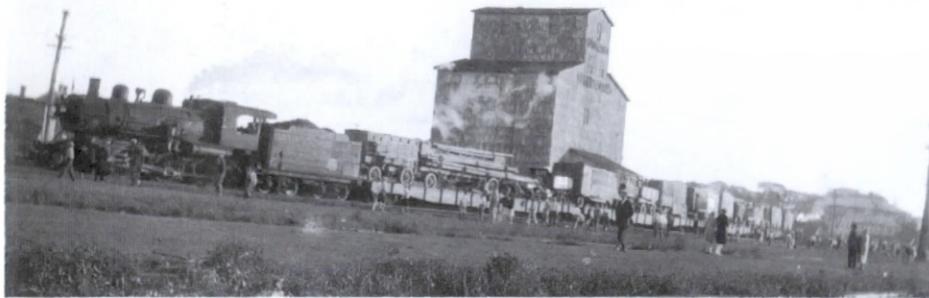
Additional new wardrobe was on the way for the spec and the parade. A new ring barn was about completed which would be used for training horses and elephants

Christy wrote: "By 1927 my circus was growing and I was eager to expand, larger tents, more animals, more parade, more training. By then I had 108 head of horses and ponies in my big horse building. This was also our training building for ring stock, only with two separate rings that did not conflict with each other. The building was also constructed with a huge hippodrome track to rehearse our specs and for training racing acts. The second floor was our sail loft where the tents were stored and repaired. The building was 92 by 150 feet.

"Eager to standardize the Christy equipment I equipped our wagon shop with machinery, blacksmiths, wagon builders, painters and mechanics. I decided all wagon poles should be exactly the same to fit any baggage, parade or cage wagon. That meant tearing all wagons down and completely standardizing them.

The Christy Mack Bulldog truck on one of the new Mt. Vernon steel flats in 1927. Ed Tracy collection.





The Christy train in 1927 showing the heavy wagons on the steel flat cars. Ed Tracy collection.

"We built a mess hall to sleep and feed 150 men. A 90 by 150 foot building was used to house and train elephants, zebras, camels, ostriches, yak, buffalo, zebu, reindeer, llamas, pigs and goats. A 55 by 120 foot cat animal house had cages the entire length of two sides, with a tunnel through the center. It allowed any cage of animals to be shifted to the training arena at the end. The cages were built from county jail steel from the cells.

"We also built our own rail yards that held 52 circus cars. We even built two wooden flat cars. After finishing them we learned we had them two feet too long. The railroad would not take them so we had to hurry and cut them shorter. Our trainmaster, Harry Johnson, was a master builder and he supervised all of the building construction.

"We had our own harness shop where we made all the tappings and the heavy baggage harness. Our harness maker, who I can only remember as Waxie, was an artist with leather.

"A ten foot chain link fence surrounded the quarters with a great doorway 35 feet high at the entrance. The front gate structure resembled the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. This structure was demolished in 1930 by a hurricane."

The April 9 *Billboard* reported on the season opener: "Houston, Texas, April 2. The Christy Bros. Shows opened their season here yesterday, using the same lot that could not be used last spring because it was under water. The weather was like mid-summer and business was big.

"Five additional cars have been placed with the show, making it a 25-car outfit. The additional equipment includes two more flats, a stock car and two sleepers. The show has been greatly enlarged in every department and there are many changes in the personnel.

"Bowman Robinson, who passed away last fall, has been succeeded by George Steele as legal adjuster, and J.

F. Johnson is his assistant. The canvas is in charge of C. C. Gibson, who had the side show last season. Harry Sells, who has been superintendent of winter quarters, left as soon as the show was loaded for his home. L. L. Buckner, who had the Lee Bros. canvas last season, is now in charge of the side show canvas, and the stock is in charge of Jip Harris. P. H. McGrath is the new trainmaster, in place of Harry Johnson, and Harry Delvine has been transferred from 24-hour man to superintendent of lights. W. H. Muldoon, from the Lee show, is the new steward. Francis Friend is his assistant. Jack Davis is the new superintendent of lead stock. Everett James has the big show band. Col. Sam Dawson, who was press agent with the Lee show last season, is with the show as special representative and assists on the front door. The front-door staff is composed of Fletcher Smith, again press agent with the show, and Harry Kutz.

"The show is practically all new and has been nearly doubled in size by combining most of the equipment of the Lee show with it. All of the canvas is new, and the menagerie with its 6 poles and 30 cages of animals, was a surprise to the crowd. There are eight steel pits along the center, in which are exhibited rare specimens of hay animals, including the eight reindeer and the zebras, kangaroos and stork, as well as the baby camel and ostriches. There is a six pole big top, all new scenery for the opening spec and seats for 5,500 around the center and the two ends. The performance is given in three rings and two steel arenas.

"The opening spectacle of Noah and the Ark has been rewritten, and is presented on a much more pretentious scale than last season. A feature is the singing of Jean Woodward and Mrs. Everett James. All of the wardrobe is new

and the costumes of the singers and dancers are extremely beautiful and attractive.

"Equestrian Director Merritt Belew is entitled to much credit for the smoothness of the opening performances. The program of 28 numbers was run off in an hour and 40 minutes. Following the spec, came a series of pony drills in the three rings and two arenas. Then the bears went through their stunts in the arenas and the elephants worked in the three rings. A number of perch acts filled the air in all sections of the tent and the beauty cart was driven around the track with Miss Woodward singing and gaily plumaged birds mounted around her. Goats walked tight ropes and leopards rode elephants and horses in the arena. The Santa Claus number went over big with the eight reindeer. The football horses set the crowd shouting approval and caused many a laugh. A group of greyhounds leaped over elephants and a series of animal acts followed in the arenas. The famous 36 horse liberty horse act was next and was one of the big features of the program. An exhibition of dexterity followed and mixed groups of wild animals worked in the arenas. The high-jumping ponies and the racing camels won much applause. Six groups of trained dogs went over to good applause. The posing horses were followed by an elephant dancing the Charleston and a laughable exhibition of the Black Bottom. The elephants again went through intricate maneuvers, and there was a long mount and three of them did a shimmy dance. Eight wire acts at one time kept the audience interested, and the songs, went over to much applause. There were two big lion acts in the arenas, introduced by John Hoffman and Capt. Terrell Jacobs, and the performance closed with the hunting scene. The clowns were working be-

The America tableau leaving the lot for a 1927 parade. Pfening Archives.



tween most of the acts. There were 28 gird in the big menage number, and it was one of the big features.

"The concert had good patronage, big menage act, with special music and presented the Indians in native dances, a wild west program, and Joe Coffey, who met a local wrestler at each performance.

"The parade required 26 minutes to pass a given point, and the wagons were not stretched unreasonably apart. There were in line nine elephants, 14 camels and more than 100 head of finely groomed stock. One section was devoted to the Indians, and the cowboys and girls and the clowns had a wagon to themselves.

"Following the parade, Henry Emgard opened his side show and did a big business, as did Robert Howe with his pit show. The show made good time in loading, and left for Galveston early Saturday morning. It was in Beaumont Sunday and Monday, and will work east, making most of the Louisiana cities before starting north.

"The roster of the show is as follows: George W. Christy, sole owner; Mrs. George W. Christy, treasurer; Bert Rutherford, general agent; George Steele, legal adjuster; J. F. Johnson, assistant; Frank J. O'Donnell, contracting agent and advance press agent; Fletcher Smith, press agent with show; E. H. Staats, manager advance car; James Casey, special agent; Col. Sam M. Dawson, special representative; Harry P. Kutz, auditor; Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Everett James, bandmaster; Walter McCorkhill, 24-hour man; Henry Emgard, manager side show; C. C. Gibson, superintendent of canvas; Jip Harris, boss hostler; P. H. McGrath, trainmaster; Clarence (Red) Shelton, manager of concessions; W. H. Muldoon, steward; Francis Friend, assistant; L. L. Buckner, side show canvas boss; Ray O'Wesney, superintendent of reserved seat tickets; Jack Davis, superintendent lead stock; Capt. John Hoffman, superintendent of animals; Vernon H. (Slim) Walker, superintendent of elephants; Robert Howe, manager of pit show; Prof. Deu, side show bandmaster; Mike Ellis, master mechanic; Harry Delvine, superintendent lights; Ray Streator, superintendent ring stock; Jack Fenton, advertising banners; Fletcher Smith, Ray O'Wesney and Henry Emgard, announcers. Reserved seat ticket sellers: Elmer Meyers, C. Cautin, Joe Hines, James Smith, Harry Stokes and John Lloyd.

"Side show: Henry Emgard, manager; A. B. (Curly) Murray, assistant manager; Larrow Family; Madam Syl-

via, snakes; Fritz Recardo, sword swallower; La Berto and wife, knife throwers; Melita, sword walker; Kin-caid, fire king; Lorow brothers, Punch and Judy and knee figures; Lessig, gun spinner and magic; Prof. Deu's Minstrels; Herbert Graves and Bowman Robinson Jr., ticket sellers. Pit show: Robert Howe, manager; Princess Tiny; Jolly Eva, fat girl; six footed horse; and monkey family. Concessions: Clarence Shelton, manager; Henry Allen, Ray Morrison, Jack Rindges, Henry Allen, Knox Qualls, Cecil Stapleton, Virgil Boice, R. M. Jones, Bob E. Umpleby, Fred Proper, Will Hunt, Harry Armond, and Mrs. T. J. Levitt."

Christy noted: "The fifth stand of the 1927 season was Lake Charles, Louisiana on April 6. Our tents were set up early on a bright day. The parade went out on schedule. A large crowd turned out for the matinee. The five ring, six pole big top was packed. The show started as usual. I was seated in the marque with my barometer tied to a pole. It was there every day so I could watch weather conditions. I was watching some clouds in the west. Suddenly without warning two complete funnels formed in the sky with their tails dripping close to the ground. It looked like it was just a few miles away. Sensing the great danger from tornadoes I quickly blew my whistle to signal to stop the performance and clear the tents. My storm warning was a continuous blast which everyone with the circus understood.

"The equestrian director immediately stopped the show and asked everyone to leave on account of the storm. Many in the audience fled. I went inside trying to remove all. Many refused to leave since by then it was raining hard. In a few more minutes the funnels struck and down went everything. The big tent was a total wreck. Pandemonium prevailed, women, men and children were under the fallen canvas. I was struck by a pole and was knocked out. I laid along side one of the ring curbs until water was dashing in my face from the torrential rain revived me. A number of patrons were injured. One of our Indians from the wild west department was struck by a tent pole and was unconscious for four days in a hospital before he was released. One tent pole speared entirely through a lion cage missing the animals. The steel arenas were a twisted mass. The horses were loose. Elephants were trumpeting bewildered as the elephant men had heeded the signal to leave. I had most of the elephants trained to accept a huge great dane dog as a sort of mascot. Each elephant had its own dog.



The Christy blowdown in Lake Charles, Louisiana on April 6. Pfening Archives.

We trained them in this way to restrain the elephants in thunder storms. All the elephant hands had to do was circle the elephants and tie or hold the dogs in the center. Those elephants would not run away from their dogs.

"The disaster ended with the stay in Lake Charles. We loaded the wreckage and went on to Alexandria, the next stand. We unloaded and called every man out to help straighten up the damage and sew what we could of the strips of canvas that were left of the big top. But the performance did go on that next day with a badly damaged tent and less seats than we had the day before. The element of a storm, especially high winds was one of greatest fears of the circus."

After the opening in Houston Christy moved through Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas and entered Illinois at Murphysville on April 18. During the first few weeks of the season the show was caught in floods and suffered four serious blow downs, with the loss of considerable equipment.

By the middle of April the performance had been greatly strengthened by the addition of several numbers, including two acrobatic acts, a three person wire act and the Brocks on horizontal bars and revolving trapeze.

While in the Chicago area a cyclone struck the circus and wrecked the big top and a number of smaller tents.

Christy played Evans-ton, Illinois on May 7 and made the short trip overland to Melrose Park the next day. Walter Driver, of the Driver Bros. Tent Company in Chicago, delivered a new big top at Melrose Park. It was somewhat larger than the one that had recently been damaged. While on the lot Driver received an order for several new side show banners.

Christy newspaper ad used in Baraboo in 1927. Circus World Museum collection.

On May 10 the show entered Wisconsin at Kenosha and remained in the Badger State until the 31st. The Christy outfit Sundayed in Baraboo before showing there on May 30. While in Baraboo the Swan, and Lion and Mirror bandwagons, two cages and two pony wagons were loaded on the train. Christy later stated that a couple of wagons had to be left in Baraboo to allow room on the train for those picked up.

The June 18 *Billboard* reported: "Christy Bros. Circus was in Hamilton, Ohio, last Wednesday, using the fair-grounds, a very good location. The day was an ideal one, and business on the whole was good. The matinee attendance was fair, but at night the show played to a near capacity audience. An excellent parade was given and it attracted a large number of people in Hamilton.

"With its spread of new canvas, received while the show was playing Chicago territory, the show makes a dandy appearance. It is a 120-foot top with three 40s and two 30s. Christy's is a 25-car outfit, one car being used for the advance.

"The program, as heretofore, consists mostly of animal acts, both wild and domestic, and a few circus features. It is very good entertainment, and a number of the acts came in for much applause. The performance is given in a snappy manner under the able direction of Merritt Belew, and Everett James' band deserves much credit for its selection of numbers for the various displays. The singing in the spec, Noah and the Ark, is exceptionally

SEE THE BIG PARADE  
Baraboo **MAY 30**  
MON.

**CHRISTY BROS.**  
**BIG 5 RING**  
**WILD ANIMAL SHOWS**

**The Newest**  
**Big Show In All**  
**The World**

5 Continent Menagerie

1250 People - 500 Horses - 50 Cages Animals  
30 Lions - 2 Cows of Elephants and Camels  
5 Bands - 2 Callopes - 2 Complete Electric  
Light Systems - 30 Double Length Steel Cars  
6 Pole Big Top - 5 Mammoth Rings  
2 Steel Arenas - Wild Beast Hippodrome

1000 Character Bible  
Spectacle

Noah and the Ark

The Largest, Costliest and  
Most Magnificent Open Den

Free Street Parade at  
11 O'Clock Noon Daily

**2 SHOWS DAILY 2 and 8 P.M.**

PARADE AT 1 P. M.

good, the vocalists being Jean Woodward, Mrs. Everett James and Miss Emgard.

"Following the spectacle, the opening number, the program follows in order: Pony drills, five in number, presented by Belew, Jim Williams, Bert Dennis, John Tooig and D. Davis with hind-leg walking ponies; Dennis and Williams presenting bears; John Hoffman with a mixed group; Captain Jacobs, lions; elephants, presented by Dorothy Campbell, Bobby Kruger, Irma Magrath, Nita Belew and Myrtle Davis; Edna Brock, on the revolving trapeze and,

Misses Wickler and Lake, on the trapeze; goats and sheep presented by May Delvine, Bernice Chapin and Bert Dennis; riding leopard on elephant, worked by Nita Belew; a riding baboon on elephant by John Hoffman; swinging ladders, the participants being Misses Clark, Lake, James, Chapin, Wickler, Kruger and Babe Davis; football horses, by Belew, Williams and Dennis; high-jumping elks; camel acts, presented by Jim Williams and Jack Davis; leaping greyhounds, presented by John Tooig, Bert Dennis and Jim Williams; three liberty horse acts (12 animals in each number), the trainers being Belew, Dennis and Williams; iron jaw, Mrs. James and Misses Wickler and Lake; ponies, Irma Magrath; dogs presented by Lola O'Wesney, Flo Robinson and Nita Belew; pumas, Bobby Kruger; clown band, directed by Lee Smith; pos-

The Swan bandwagon joined the Christy parade after the show played Baraboo in 1927. Ed Tracy collection.



Terrell Jacobs, at left, on Christy Bros. in 1927. Pfening Archives.

ing horses, presented by May Delvine, Miss Chapin, Flo Buckner, Nita Belew, Babe Davis, Mrs. Dennis, Miss Tooig and Lola O'Wesney; The Brocks, perch act; Roy Leonhart, contortionist, and Bert Weston, hand balancer; big elephant number, presented by Misses Campbell, Thomas and Davis; zebra and bear presented by Jim Williams; goat and pony by Bert Dennis; and John Hoffman with a riding lion; on the wire Clark Duo, the Wicklers and the Whitesides; big menage number, horses and riders being in all the rings and on the hippodrome track, the feature of this display being the clog-dancing horses, presented by Mr. and Mrs. Bert Dennis; lion acts, the trainers being Captain Jacobs and John Hoffman; the Aleck Brock Trio, clowns in a ground-bar turn; hunting scene and high-jumping horses. Some good clown numbers are put on throughout the performance.

"A Wild West concert is given after the big-show performance, in charge of Jack Lord.

"Henry Emgard, who has been with the show for a number of years, is again presenting a nice array of attractions in the kid show."

The route took the show through Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania. On July 14 Christy entered New York state at Ithica. By July 21 it was in Massachusetts for eleven dates. Rhode Island and





Connecticut followed. Additional dates were then played in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky. The circus went into Indiana at Evansville on September 26. It then cut through Illinois to Arkansas.

By October 13 it was Oklahoma where it remained until the 25th when it went back into Texas. The circus was in Texas until November 20 when it played Coushatta, Louisiana. The season closed in Freeport, Texas on December 9. The total mileage for the season was 14,138 miles.

Christy wrote: "In 1927 we contracted to send a big unit to Hawaii. It included elephants, horses and tents. We loaded it all into Southern Pacific baggage cars for the trip to San Francisco where it was loaded on a Matson Line freighter. It was the first time that line had hauled elephants. It was a big job getting the elephants on the ship. The first thing that had to be done was build stalls on the top deck for the horses and ponies. We had to fasten them with steel cables so they would not be swept overboard in a storm. Then came the matter of a big elephant house, made of thick planks. These were anchored with huge cables. Since there was no hay in Hawaii that had to be sent also. The rest of the paraphernalia was loaded in the hold.

"The first stop was Honolulu. We had to wait several days to get our equipment off the ship. Unloading the elephants was a big chore. The deck was 30 or 40 feet above the wharf. I suggested that we use a couple of flat cars with the trucks removed and use them as a ramp to take them off. This is the way we we unloaded the horses and elephants. They seemed glad to get off the ship after the trip. One horse suffered from sea sickness and frothed at the

A 1928 Christy lot scene showing, left to right the big top, canopy enclosed menagerie, side show and pit show. Pfening Archives.

mouth all the way over. The others were ok."

On December 17 Christy was awarded a judgement of \$7,420 against the Alabama Power Company by jury verdict. The circus had brought a damage suit for \$50,000 soon after a high tension wire fell and electrocuted a number of horses at Gadsden, Alabama in early September 1926.

#### 1928

Five cars were cut from the train and it returned to twenty, the number used in 1926.

The January 28 *Billboard* reported that equestrian director Merritt Belew had started breaking in new horse acts in a new big ring barn. About fifty men were working at quarters. Dike Ellis was in charge of the repair work and already had wagons ready for the paint shop. Harry Johnson was supervising the construction of the buildings.

The February 4 *Billboard* reported ten cars of Lee Bros. circus equipment had been purchased by Wortham Snell and associates. Snell was a nephew of Clarence Wortham of carnival fame.

The new wild animal house built during the winter of 1927-1928. Pfening Archives.

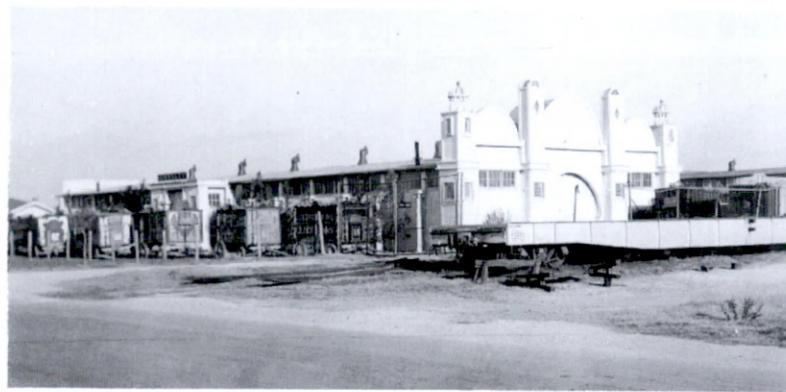
The equipment was shipped from Houston to Alexandria, Louisiana, winter quarters of the carnival. The Snell Bros. Circus was under capitalized and failed quickly. Christy bought back one advertising car; three coaches, four flats and two stock cars, loaded with wagons for \$2,731.13, a fraction of what Snell had paid him a few months earlier. This was but one example of Christy's crafty business deals.

On June 2 the Missouri Pacific Railroad moved the former Snell equipment from Alexandria, Louisiana to Dumont, Texas. The freight charge was \$932.50. Christy also paid the Missouri Pacific Railroad \$75 for track storage for the month of May.

On February 11 the trade publication noted that the Christy quarters was a busy place. It was situated twelve miles from Houston proper, at South Houston on about sixty acres situated along the main highway leading from Houston to Galveston. The quarters were flanked by the Missouri-Pacific Railroad. A spur ran from the main line into the quarters where the show cars were stored. Christy's private car was parked at the crossing on the main street.

The quarters could be reached by interurban from Houston. The circus had been in quarters nine weeks and remarkable progress had been made on the construction of new buildings. The building of a new 75 by 150 foot animal barn was under way to house the cage animals. The design was highly ornamental with big pillars and a high raised front with the name of the show.

Since the prior year land between the new building and the old training quarters building has been acquired. Steel rails were bought and new track was to be laid to accommodate all of the show





of the show cars. Many of the cars had been stored three miles away at Ellington Field. The quarters were to be surrounded by an ornamental iron fence with raised corner posts of carved stone at intervals. Rows of palm trees were to be planted.

This section of the quarters suffered from floods on occasion. A large amount of shell and loam was spread over the area, raising it six inches above the surrounding land. Both Tiger Avenue and Elephant Boulevard were lined with palm trees. A feed and hay barn was also built.

By March 3 the elephants, liberty and bear acts had returned to quarters from the E. K. Fernandez show in Honolulu which had run from December 27, 1927 to January 2, 1928 and then toured the islands.

In March Terrell Jacobs arrived in quarters to break a new animal acts. Two car loads of draft stock arrived. Jim Scully was working daily with the ring stock. The circus advertised for a trainer to work lion and bear acts since Jacobs was not to be on the show after it opened.

The show opened using a 140 foot big top with three 40s and two 50s. The menagerie was again exhibited in an unorthodox 80 by 190 foot wild west style canopy.

The April 7 *Billboard* told of the opening: "Galveston, Texas. April 2-The Christy Bros. Circus opened its season here on March 31 and business was big at both performances.

"The program is much larger this season and the parade, which was viewed by thousands, received much favorable comment. The tableaus, dens and bandwagons were beautifully decorated in silver and gold and the long line was led by a red and gold shell bandwagon with Everett James' band.

"There were three other tableau band wagons, America, Asia and Columbia, while animals were displayed

The entire Christy performing personnel posed on the Beauty and America tableaus in 1927. Pfening Archives.

in open dens. There were twelve elephants and as many camels. A Scottish band, steam calliope and a clown band also furnished music. There were three sections of mounted women, a children's menagerie section, clowns and several tandem teams of ponies, zebras and snow-white stallions. In all there were twenty-seven vehicles in line.

"The circus opened with the spectacle of Noah and the Ark, entirely rewritten and presented under the direction of Merritt Belew. There was an ensemble of more than sixty persons, several dancers and two prima donnas. The customary animal acts with many new features pleased and there was a big feature number by a troupe of Chinese acrobats recently imported and bonded into the country. Circus acts were induced between the animal performances. Everett James has a fine band of eighteen men. There was the customary wild west concert.

"The show is using a six-pole big top. Mrs. Christy was in the wagon as usual. On the front door were Fletcher Smith and Harry P. Kutz. G. W. Christy was here, there and everywhere, keeping things moving. Ray O'Wesney was a busy man, assisting Merritt Belew, handling the reserved seat ticket sales and alternating in the announcements with Fletcher Smith. Henry Emgard had good business on the side show. Robert Howe was in charge of the pit show. The circus left about midnight on a two hundred mile jump to Corpus Christi. It will be in the Rio Grande valley for ten days. Both the ticket wagon and main entrance were beautified with floral offerings from friends in this city.

"Roster: G. W. Christy, manager; Mrs. Christy, treasurer; Bert Ruth-

erford, general agent and railroad contractor; D. T. Bartlett, legal adjuster; J. F. Johnson, assistant legal adjuster; R. W. Thompson, contracting agent and contracting press agent; John T. Warren, general press representative; Fletcher Smith, press agent back with the show; Walter McCorkhill, manager of advance car; Harry P. Kutz auditor; Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Ray O'Wesney, assistant and in charge of reserve seat tickets; Jack Fenton, advertising banners; Everett James, bandmaster; Henry Emgard, side show manager; Clarence Sheldon, manager of concessions; Robert Howe, pit show manager; Norman Bain, steward; Prof. Deu, side show bandmaster; Harry Sells, superintendent of canvas; Jack Morgan, superintendent of baggage stock; Harry Dalvine, superintendent of lights; Harry Johnson, train master; H. H. Henderson, superintendent of privilege car; Tom Sculley, superintendent of ring stock; Mike Ellis, master mechanic; Jim Doherty, blacksmith; Ernie Damon, 24-hour man; Jack Rindges, superintendent outside candy stands; A. B. Murray, purchasing agent; Slim Walker, in charge of elephants; John Hoffman, superintendent of menagerie; Mrs. Jack Harris, superintendent of wardrobe."

The Christy show spent Holy Week in the Rio Grande Valley. There was a long run of 200 miles from Galveston to Corpus Christi, and the show train was all day in making the jump. There was a good matinee and a fair night house. A 110 mile jump to Harlingen followed with a late arrival. The matinee was fair and there was a good night house.

Christy played Norton, Kansas on May 2. Between performances a terrific storm came up, razing several of the smaller tents. The menagerie was emptied of its cages, the peaks were lowered and it weathered the storm.

The big top was only damaged in places. Rain fell all evening and it was decided to call it a day. The show was not loaded until daylight, due to the soft lot and condition of the road. After a 177 mile run, the train reached McCook, Nebraska at 3:00 P. M. A cold rain was falling and the 24 hour man reported the lot was under water. It was decided to stop and feed the animals and move on to Fort Collins, Colorado. By June 9 the circus was in North Dakota. The Monge family of acrobats joined the show. This group of ten South Americans had appeared with the Sells-Floto Circus in the Coliseum in Chicago. A group of Chinese had also been added to the performance.

In 1928 the Christy circus again played two towns the same day. Christy remembered: "In 1928 I played nine towns in one week. We played Wolf Point, Montana in the afternoon on July 2 and after a 51 mile run we gave a night performance in Glasgow, Montana. "This is a feat never attempted by any other circus. Strictly of my own imagination to create a first in circus history, as well as enhancing the income. [Actually Christy had played two towns the same day a couple of times before. Elmer Jones had also done this earlier with his two car circus.]

"On July 1, 1928 we advertised an afternoon show only at Plentywood and made a 122 mile run to Wolf Point where we gave a matinee only show only on July 2. "We had capacity business and had to erect every seat. We started the show at 2 p.m. We had the cook tents torn down after lunch, and loaded all the commissary, water and cook tent together with the horse tents, blacksmith shop on the flat cars. The steward had prepared lunch bags. We called these nose bags for each person on the show. A coffee barrel was set up at the cars. This was the evening meal. The show was given in its entirety at each performance in both towns to capacity crowds

"The Great Northern took great pride in such an achievement and they gave our train special clearance over their main line to be sure they would get us to Glasgow in time to show that night. The railroad magazines carried stories about this first in railroad history. I always enjoyed doing the impossible, and was the originator of many new and startling innovations in circus entrainment."

The July 14 *Billboard* reported: "George W. Christy accomplished thefeat of giving with a 20-car show two complete performances in two separate towns, making a jump of 51

miles and starting the night performance at 8:45 o'clock. It is believed that this is the first time that such a feat has been successfully maneuvered. It must be taken into consideration that it would practically be an impossibility to give two shows in two towns in one day were it not for the fact that the sun does not set in this country till after 8 o'clock and it is daylight until nearly 9:30. Then again the railroads are able to make the moves with no layouts for freights or passenger trains. The present feat was the result of the annual rodeo and roundup in Glasgow, starting July 1 and continuing four days. Rather than antagonize the rodeo people it was arranged with them to allow the Christy show to exhibit for a night performance only in the city on the evening of the second day. It was originally planned to exhibit in Wolf Point, Montana, on Sunday, but the dates were set ahead one day and a matinee only arranged for that town. The show was in Plentywood, Montana on Sunday, giving one show, and left at 6 o'clock, a run of 122 miles for Wolf Point.

"Harry Delvine, with Eddie Johnson and crew, went to Glasgow from Plentywood Sunday and laid out the lot and drove all the stakes previous to the arrival of the show train. In both Wolf Point and Glasgow railroad lots were used. Everything was up Monday morning by 8 o'clock, and the parade left the lot at 10:30. The doors opened at 12 o'clock and the show started at 12:30. Everything was erected here, and all but the big top and the dressing room was razed as soon as the big show started.

"When the show was over, with everybody jumping in and giving a hand, it was but the work of an hour to have the show off the lot, and at 2:15 everything was over for the day as far as Wolf Point was concerned. The performance was not cut and the concert was given as usual. The show was loaded and the train left for Glasgow at 3:25 p.m. The Great Northern had one of its moguls pulling the train and Glasgow was

reached at 5:35. Here nothing but the big top was erected. The spec was given and the program was short only the animal acts. The doors opened at 8:15 and the performance started at 8:45 with a bigger crowd than at Wolf Point. Nothing was unloaded that was not actually necessary to put up the big top and give the night performance. Even the performers' trunks were left in the wagons.

The July 21 *Billboard* reported: "The week ending at Harlowton, Montana on July 8 was the biggest of the season, with capacity houses at every matinee and the usual fair house at night. The correspondent of the Great Falls *Daily Tribune*, in a special to that paper from Plentywood, estimated the crowd in town for the circus at 7,000 and said that people came 40 miles to see the show.



A Christy Bros. Circus lithograph used in 1928. Ken Harck collection.

"At Havre on the Fourth of July they were sitting on the straw at the matinee, but it rained at night. The usual July 4th dinner was served under the supervision of Ray O'Wesney, and a fine menu was prepared by Chef Gallagher. There was a big crowd of Indians around the lot all day and what was left after the spread was served to them."

Christy remembered: "While playing Havre on July 4 we had some trouble with a tough crowd of young fellows. It finally broke out into a first class Hey Rube while we were packing up. They attacked us with rocks, clubs, knives and beer bottles. I always carried a billy club and a gun loaded with a cartridge sufficient to paralyze several hundred people with tear gas. During the fight I was striking right and left with the billy, while I was struck by fists and bottles. Believe it or not I never realized that I had gas. I could have pulled the safety on that gas gun and put them all out of service."

En route to Roundup, Montana, three flat cars jumped a switch in the yards at Harlowtown, but there was no serious damage done and the train

was delayed only a short time.

The August 8 *Billboard* reported: "The splendid business that the Christy show had enjoyed on the Western trip still kept up. The circus was one of the features at the convention of the American Legion at Cheyenne, Wyoming on July 20. The circus parade was the third division of the big parade. There was a good matinee and a big night crowd. Ken Maynard, formerly with Sparks and Ringling shows, now a star with First National Pictures, was a visitor."

Christy met opposition from Sells-Floto at Pocatello and Idaho Falls. A big storm came up at Pocatello, Idaho on July 27 just before the doors opened for the night show. A heavy wind ripped and tore the menagerie, but the top was saved. The menagerie tent was repaired at Idaho Falls on the 30th.

The steam calliope was placed in the Union Pacific shops at Evanston, Wyoming where it was given a thorough inspection. It emerged from the railroad shop at Ogden with all new flues.

The longest jump of the season was from Medford, Oregon to Red Bluff, California. The train left at midnight and did not reach Red Bluff until 5:30 p.m. It was a Sunday stand and only one performance was given to a capacity crowd, starting at 9 o'clock.

A Christy sleeper was practically destroyed by fire in Red Bluff on August 19. The fire was reported to have started when sparks from the circus light plant caused an explosion of a can of gasoline. The car was occupied by the band, ticket sellers, butchers and performers, who lost everything. The fire occurred just after the train had been unloaded. The Southern Pacific furnished a day coach and the train later proceeded to Oroville. This reduced the train to 19 cars, including the advance car.

One of the biggest stands of the season was on August 22 in Reno, Nevada. The show had jumped from Stockton, California, a distance of 202 miles, arriving at two in the afternoon. The town was crowded with people who waited patiently until it was announced that the parade was off. The side show opened at 5:30 and was jammed until 10. The crowd filled the big top to the ring banks in half an hour after the doors opened. Christy ordered the doors closed and tickets were sold for second performance which started at 9:15 with the tent filled a second time.

The Christy circus played Las Vegas, Nevada on September 3 and after



The Palm Tree tableau in a Christy parade. Pfening Archives.

a 181 mile run arrived in Barstow, California which was billed as a matinee only. The heat was almost unbearable and the people and animals suffered intensely. On arrival in Barstow it was decided not to unload the show. A stop was made to feed and water the stock and the flats with the animal cages were run under the Santa Fe water tanks. All the animals were given a thorough drenching. All the cars were also drenched, as they were dry as tinder.

The run out of Barstow to Wickenburg, Arizona was 294 miles. It was across the desert and was the worst jump of the season. It was 110 in the shade in Barstow, and out on the desert there was not a breath of air, even with the train running. The rain left at 2:35 p.m. and it was morning before Wickenburg was reached. The heat in the sleepers was insufferable and as a respite most of the performers took blankets and sought relief on the flats under the wagons. It was the hottest day of the season at Wickenburg, a little town in the heart of the desert. The train was unloaded and the tents erected, and then it was decided not to give a performance and the train was reloaded and left in the evening for Phoenix, reaching there around midnight.

The train was unloaded as soon as it arrived to protect the stock. City sprinkling carts were kept busy wetting down the sandy lot. The parade was given for the first time in a week.

By October 21 Christy was in Garden City, Kansas. A special campaign train for Al Smith stopped en route to Denver stopped at the runs as the show was being unloaded at night. The presidential candidate watched the train loaded and made a few remarks to the crowd that had gathered.

The December 1 *Billboard* reported: "The Christy Show is now in the newly developed farming area of South-

western Texas near the border and mostly populated by Mexicans. Business is good, as the farmers are just getting money from the big spinach crops. The circus entered Texas at Nacogdoches and used a lot a long way out. The owners of the picture houses at Kerrville forced the show to use a lot two miles from town, and in their endeavors to bar all tent shows from the city leased, it is said, all the available lots within a radius of a mile from the city all directions. The show did not parade,

but did a good crowd at the matinee and at the night show.

"The show spent Sunday November 18 at New Braunfels and then made a long run through San Antonio to Crystal City. The show will close in Madisonville, Texas on November 28 and return to its quarters at Houston. The distance traveled during the season will be 22,908 miles."

The final three days were cancelled and the show closed in Gonzales on November 24 due to cold weather.

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## Advance Advertising Cars

Here is a glimpse at the advance cars of the golden years of the circus. Some had fancy wood carvings with gold leaf on the sides. Others had gaudy pictures of things to see when the circus came to town.

Most of the advance cars were converted Pullman cars. At one end of the car the wash room was remodeled as the stateroom and office for the car manager. At the other end of the car was a steam boiler and equipment to make the paste used by the billing crew. In the remainder of the car they would leave all the upper berths on both sides of the aisle for the men to sleep. They would tear out all the lower berths and build shelves on both sides the entire length of the upper berths. Underneath the shelves cabinets were installed to store the pictorial lithographs and date sheets. The date sheets would be attached to the window lithographs at night after the billing crew returned to the car after working their routes. This chore was called "circusing" the paper. The lithographs then would be ready for the next day in a different town.

The flaming lithographs that heralded the star spangled caravan were often pasted with date "tails," sometimes printed in Hebrew or Yiddish for cities like New York and Chicago which had large Jewish populations. In Montreal and other parts of Quebec they were printed in French, and in parts of the Southwest in Spanish.

As on the circus the work on the advance car was never done. The men were up at the crack of dawn and would wearily wend their way back to the car after dark many a time. They still had more to do. Paper and date sheets had to be readied for the next day. Sometimes some of the men on the car might be held up on a country route. When they got back, the car had already gone to the next town. The car manager would always leave word with the trainmaster at the depot and the men would take the first train to the next town.

I still remember the time my father was operating one of his restaurants. It was situated near the local livery stable. All the advance cars that came to my home town would hire teams and wagons from this stable. As our restaurant was handy the men made our place their headquarters while in town. Like circus hands they were most talkative about all the things that happened to make their lives on the advance car so interesting. That is how I became well versed in the operation of the circus advance.

# THE CIRCUS STEWARD

## Part X

By John M. Staley

One of the years I was on Charles Ringling's palatial yacht I was dusting and putting the furniture in place in the music room. Mr. Charles had finished playing his violin. Mrs. Charles had been his accompanist on the piano.

Out of clear sky Mr. Charles said, "Johnnie how would you like to go out on one of the advance cars and learn the trade." Without batting an eye I told him I would rather stay behind with all the noise and bustle of the crowds and hear the bands each day. He never mentioned the advance car again.

### Money Loaners

Money loaning has always been big business around the circus. It was very lucrative for certain people in different departments. The bigger money sharks were usually found in the baggage stock, ring stock, properties, cook house and big top departments.

In the baggage department, which consisted of all the draft or work horse, the "skimmers" and helpers were blessed with two money loaners. One of them was Dick Sells, an eight horse hook rope skinner. He was used whenever any wagon was stuck and needed help or to help pull wagons up a steep hill.

The John Robinson Circus No. 1 advance car decorated with carvings in 1903. Pfening Archives.

Dick was the small money loaner. One to ten dollars was tops. The other loaner was a man by the name of Grant. He drove a two horse hook rope team at the runs, pulling the wagons on and off the flat cars. Should there be a crap game around the train you no doubt

would find Grant. He was the big loaner. If a man was known and good for the money he could get a hundred dollar loan as fast as a dollar.

Besides these two there were money sharks in the ring stock, properties, big top, train and cook house departments. No doubt others I did not know about. Herbert Weaver, commissary and time keeper for the workingmen and bosses, at times tried to stop the black men from borrowing money, as it was hard for most of them to pay the money back. Weaver would charge them fifty cents on the dollar and still they would borrow.

Workingmen drew very small pay. The scale varied from one department to another, but three to fifteen dollars per week was tops. This included meals and sleeping accommodations.

Money loaners tried not to infringe on other departments. Each had his own area of operation. They worked on a seven day week, which in those days ended on Saturday. For each dollar borrowed that person had to pay back one dollar and twenty-five cents. If he paid it back a day late, which would be Sunday, the borrower would have to pay fifty cents on each dollar. If the man was not able to pay the full amount on Saturday he could pay the interest and let the principal ride for a week. In any case he had to pay twenty five cent interest on money bor-



rowed. I have known of some cases where a man would pay the interest week after week and never pay any of the principal until he was threatened bodily to pay up the full amount.

Dick Sells, eight horse driver and loan shark of the Ringling-Barnum baggage horse department in 1925. Pfenning Archives.

The cookhouse had the best set-up of the entire circus. After the management removed the time keeping books from the commissary and made a separate department, the new cookhouse timekeeper also loaned money on the side. Through mutual agreement any person being paid off in the cookhouse with a "pink slip" had to be okayed in ink by the cook house money loaner. After the man was paid off the time keeper would deduct the amount owed and hold it for the shark. The only way the cookhouse loaner could lose his money was for the man to die or for him to walk off the show and leave his pay in the wagon.

On any two or more day stand you could always find a crap or a poker game going full blast. The money loaner also controlled these games. He would have a man at each game "cutting" for the house. I have seen men in these games borrow the same amount time after time. At these games the borrower would ask for money in four dollar segments. That way the man was charged five dollars for the four dollars borrowed, if only for one turn of the dice or card.

### When Kaiser and Prince Decamped

This story was written by Charles J. Luckey.

When I was on the Sells-Floto Circus we had two lions escape their cage at Bad Axe, Michigan on August 6, 1919. Here's what happened.

Out of a clear blue sky we heard a terrible noise and commotion coming from the menagerie. Since the side wall was up, we could not see inside. Someone shouted "the lions are out!" The terrible din from inside grew into a bedlam, elephants trumpeting, lions and tigers roaring, parrots and macaws shrieking, men shouting above all this noise. The pandemonium was tremendous, ear splitting, so much



that everyone within hearing distance was on his toes.

How all this turmoil started is easy to understand. The circus men were in a hurry as usual trying to get the big show ready and the parade out on time. One of the cage men cleaning out his cage to be ready for parade in his haste forgot to close the end door of the cage containing three lions. They were black maned, African males, named Hugo, Prince and Kaiser.

Someone noticed that one of the cages was open. He yelled to the nearest man to close the door. He was too late, with one look inside he gave out a yell. His hat was standing in the air for a few seconds after he had ran from under it. As all the men in the menagerie were busy at the time they never noticed the door on the cage being open until the lions were amongst the elephants, who are their natural enemies. Consequently the elephants started stammering with their trunks right and left, trumpeting madly, trying to break loose. They finally drove the lions away.

Kaiser went out through a hole in the side wall of the menagerie, jumped the wire mesh fence, crossed the race track, then leaped into the tall weeds with one of the animal hands hot in pursuit until he lost Kaiser in the tall grass.

Hugo was the most timid of the three lions. After jumping out of his cage he went under another cage wagon, then back tracking he saw the open cage door, jumped in, then crawled over in a corner and laid down. This may sound strange, but when a wild animal is born in captivity and is liberated, they become liberated; they look on most humans as enemies. Should they attack anyone it's purely in self defense, trying to get you first. That is why Hugo went back to his cage, for his own safety.

Not so with Prince. He was so irritated by being slammed around by the elephants, where no doubt he received rough treatment. Being somewhat confused, he turned his attention to the hybrid zebras, who were tied to a picket line. As Prince advanced they started kicking and kept on kicking between Prince's snarling. Then the zebras squealed louder and kept right on kicking. All this made so much noise it

started the elephants again. The elephant men led the elephants outside of the tent to avoid any more trouble, and chained them to the heavy wagons.

Prince all this time was in hot dispute with the zebras. But they held their own. Prince would leap high in the air, trying to get near enough for the kill. But at every turn he was met with a battery of flying hoofs. Time after time he tried, but was met with the same ferocious barrage. Seeing his attempts fruitless he withdrew. Then he spied a small mule, who in the melee had broken loose.

Prince made a desperate leap and landed on the mule's back, snarling, biting and clawing, but the little mule was not licked. Trying to shake Prince off its back, she put on a good bucking act. Prince had his fangs buried deep in the mule's neck, his claws driven deep into her flesh. Still, he had a very hard time trying to stay on the mule's back. She whirled and bucked, then finally galloped out the back door of the menagerie, out into the open. The animal man who had the zebras had run outside during the excitement and for protection had picked up a wooden stake. As the mule with Prince on his back came out the back door of the menagerie all the onlookers were shouting and hollering "knock him off-knock him off." As the mule passed the man he raised the stake with both hands over his head and came down on Prince's head making a big, big thud. Prince gasped, then fell to the ground.

The little mule, after being liberated from Prince, just leaped away. Although badly lacerated and bleeding, she ran toward the horse tent. Once inside she hee-hawed to her heart's content as if she was glad to be alive.

All this time Prince had been laying on the ground motionless. All thought him dead. The animal man evidently was of the same opinion. He stood there gazing at the seemingly immobile lion, his chest a little out, proudly proclaiming his achievement. But his broadcast was short lived, because, just then, Prince sat up on his haunches, shaking his head like a prize fighter after being knocked groggy. The animal man could only say, "well." With his heart in his mouth, he backed up a few steps, dropped the wooden stake, and was gone with the wind, heading straight for the menagerie.

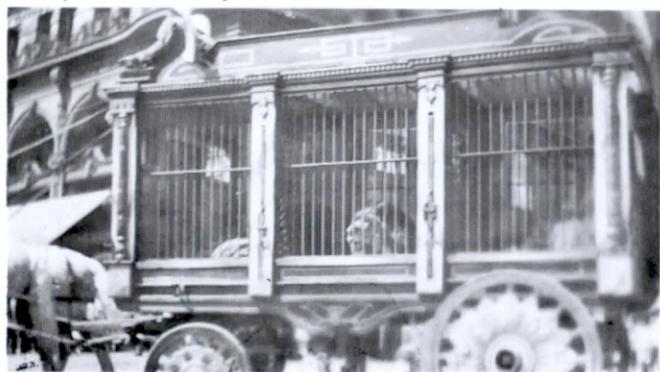
Prince, a little dazed, took the opposite direction, heading for the big grandstand. The stands were almost half full, mostly women and children. When they saw the lion making a bee-

line for the grandstand they did not waste any time finding higher places. Serious as it was, it was amusing to see what a person will do in the face of approaching danger. We all roared with laughter.

But when Prince came to a four foot high mesh wire fence he stopped. A hush fell over the grandstand, everyone staring silently. Children clung to their mothers, whimpering, softly crying, with eyes fixed fiercely on the lion. But Prince, too dazed and confused to jump this fence, ran back and forth, as though he was looking for an opening. Not finding any, he trotted aimlessly toward the dog pens. A sigh of relief came out of the grandstand. The tension eased. Although the danger had by no means passed the audience felt more secure seeing the lion heading for the dog pens. The average dog pen on the circus was sixteen feet square and four feet high, made of sturdy framework and heavy wire mesh, a kennel for trained dogs. The pen was erected next to the dog wagon. All the trainer had to do was open each cage on the wagon and put them in the exercise pen. The trainer was sitting in the center of the pen, nursing a sick dog. Being a long distance from the menagerie the dog man gave no thought to a roaming lion, even with all the shouting. As the lion approached his attention was diverted from the sick dog. But as Prince leaped into the dog pen, out came all the dogs and trainer, head first. Prince was harmless, but badly frightened and shaking like a leaf as he crawled under the dog wagon. We dismantled the dog pen, and secured the sections around the dog wagon, forming a cage where Prince was held until a cage could be brought to the dog wagon.

During the lion and mule episode several unusual incidents took place. For instance the head ticket seller's over-weight wife, a former performer and manege rider, had been downtown shopping and was carrying a load

A Sells-Floto Circus two lion cage in a 1919 parade. Pfening Archives



of bundles. When she spied the mule with the lion on its back coming her way, she let out a scream and headed for the nearest wagon, which happened to be a tableau parade wagon with massive wood carvings on each side. The top of the wagon had already been a refuge for some people. The steps to mount the wagon were in the front, but she had no time to look for them. She ran up to the side of the wagon, grabbing at carvings on her way to the top, never dropping a single package. She had to have a ladder to get down.

During all this excitement the elephants became unruly and tried to break loose. One large male, named Snyder, seemed more agitated than the others. The elephant men circled around Snyder with hooks, whips and wooden stakes. But that did not stop Snyder. He kept jerking and jerking from side to side. At last he broke the heavy chain. The boss elephant man tried to hold Snyder by the top of the ear, next to his head with a bull hook. But by turning round and around he broke the hold. Being free he started toward the big tent. The boss man ran beside Snyder trying again and again to get another hold with his bull hook, but to no avail. Finally he grabbed Snyder's tail with his left hand, using his whip with his right trying to cut him down. But Snyder was not to be stopped. He was too scared.

He took out across the fields, with the boss elephant man hanging onto his tail, hitting the ground every ten feet. All of a sudden he veered in the direction of the cook house, heading for the front door. The cookhouse men were all eating. Seeing Snyder coming their way they all took to the high spots, but Snyder stopped as he got to the front door of the cookhouse. Some wise guys said Snyder stopped because the meal flag was down and the meal was over. The run must have taken all the starch out of the elephant and perhaps cooled him off, as he was quietly feeding on grass in front of the cookhouse when the herd workers came and led him back to the menagerie.

We still had Kaiser hiding out in the high weeds. He was not a vicious lion. He had been a pet while a cub, but you never can tell about a three year old lion. If cornered, he could be darn mean. However he had to be caught before an outsider happened to accidentally walk up and scare him. We finally

located his hiding place, put a man on watch while we went back to the horse tents and took down a section of its seven foot wide sidewall. We rounded up about twenty five men who unrolled the sidewall out full length. They were then lined up behind the side wall, holding it in front of them, but not off the ground. They kept out of sight, around three feet apart, and in a straight line until the leader was past Kaiser. He felt or scented something wrong, as he kept moving ahead of us. Suddenly a lion in the menagerie let out a big roar that stopped him short. We kept on going. When we were ahead of him we circled, slowly and cautiously, until both ends of the sidewall met. At long last we had Kaiser in a corral. Luckily there were no guns in that crowd of men, only a few whips. Strange as it may seem circus folks do not believe in killing animals no matter how vicious they seem to be.

One of the black men with us that day felt something move close to his feet, being a bit curious he peered over the side wall he was holding. Sure enough there was Kaiser lying at his feet. All the poor guy said was "Olordy." We have never seen hide or hair of him since. He did not even stop to collect his pay.

An elephant pulled the lion cage, with Hugo coming along for the ride, over to the fence, turned the cage with the end door toward the corral. The two end men moved over to the cage, parted, then walked close beside the cage, meeting in front, leaving the cage inside the circle. Everybody then closed in, crowding Kaiser up to the cage. One of the animal men had a whip. When he cracked it, it startled the lion. Seeing the open door, which was the only way out, he leaped into the cage. The door was secured.

So ends another chapter of many unusual experiences realized, but never recorded. The average circus man takes it in stride as another daily routine, forgets it as soon as it is over.

#### The Start of the Indoor and Out of Money Winter Circus

I remember one winter soon after World War I. I was working in the winter quarters of the Ringling-Barnum Circus at Bridgeport, Connecticut. Fred Bradna was in and out of quarters. I heard he was putting together some circus acts for a winter indoor date which would open at an old armory in Bridgeport that had been empty for a number of years.

The indoor circus opened for a week's stand. So few people came the first three or four nights that Bradna did not have money to buy coal to heat

the armory. At the final performance on Saturday night some show hands came in to get out of the cold. They soon departed as it was warmer outside, leaving the performers to their icy fate.

John Agee and Fred Bradna on Ringling-Barnum in the 1920s. Pfening Archives.

When the final circus performance was over that fateful Saturday the performers almost rioted as there was no money in the till.

I was told later that Bradna wired Richard T. Ringling at his sheep ranch in Montana for money to pay off all the employees. The money was sent the next day and the circus continued to the next stand.

I believe that was the start of the old saying, "the indoor and out of money circus."



#### Free Chewing Gum

The Ringling-Barnum Circus was showing for a week in Philadelphia at the old circus grounds at Eleventh and Erie. It was in the early twenties.

One afternoon not long before the circus performance started there appeared on the midway at least five girls all dressed in cute uniforms. They were passing out samples which looked like chewing gum, or more so like the old time Chiclets, in pasteboard boxes containing had two samples.

There were a large number of children attending the circus. The kids thought that the packages contained chewing gum. So they would double back and get a second or third or fourth free package. The girls were passing out the samples could not tell to whom they gave them or how many times the same face appeared.

The matinee performance was almost a sell out. It was hot as blazes. People were sitting on straw on the hippodrome track. In those years the circus performance lasted about three hours. The doors would open at least an hour before, sometimes earlier.

This particular afternoon the performance was nearly three quarters over when out of a clear sky boys and girls tried to beat each other to the rest rooms, the nearest exit, or any place under the canvas sidewall of the big tent.

As you probably guessed by now the samples of chewing gum were Feenamints.

#### Nicknames

It is a toss up whether the military,

carnivals or circuses used nicknames more. I have been around carnivals and circuses and I lean toward the circus. It was not unusual to hear someone say "did you know that so and so passed away," or "so and so is in the hospital." The name does not ring a bell. And if my informant should say the man at one time worked for me in the cook house I no doubt would ask if he had a nickname. If so, then it would dawn on me who he was talking about. In the many years that I hired and fired I have given nicknames to hundreds, young and old. Some would stick for life. Others would be forgotten. The names below are only a few as after a while it gets boresome. Some old-timers will no doubt recognize many of the names at a glance. And perhaps theirs is listed.

Here they are: Congo, Toto, Blink, Babe, Pickles, Curley, Corkie, Sappho, Slufoot, Mable, Rusty, Slats, Sonny, Torchy, Count, Soldier, Blocks, Lard, Rockie, Cook House Whitie, Seattle Charlie, Worcester Pete, Yorkie Pete, Camel Dutch, Jim the Fixer, Feed Pile Joe, Sidewall Shorty, Dan the Butcher, Side Show Smitty, Two Gun Whittie, Smoke Wagon Slim, Ice Cream Shorty, Gold Room Paddy, Full House Marie, Blue, Red, Goldie, Pinkie, Whitie, Yellow, Brownie, Blondie, Blackie, Polock, Dopey, Heavy, Peanuts, Dago, Duke, Fatso, Vino, Tiny, Boob, Pottsville Shorty, Baraboo Red, Camel Slim, Chicken Charlie, Gilly Wagon Red, Pete the Greek, Rattlesnake Slim, Bright Eyes, Water Wagon, Frank the Wop, Mickie Mouse, Hammerhead, Wooden Shoe Dutch, Leadbar Slim, Little Henry.

Dad, Silk, Jo Jo, Dutch, Irish, Waxie, Bozo, Specks, Bing, Spanky, Mustache, Sunshine, Lightning, Ambition, Preacher, Dummy, Pee Wee, Slick, Skipper, Kilroy, Goose, Monk, Camel, Possum, Pelican, Hoosier, Hay Wire, Floto, Barnum, Ringling, Hagenbeck, Forepaugh, Phillip, Kokomo, Arky, China, Cuba, Frenchie.

Pete the Pusher, Ansonia Red, Battle Creek, Hippo Charlie, Diamond Jack, Pimple Face, Baby Tramp, Wagon Wheel, Race Track, Dago Jack, Whiskey Pete, Little Max, Cowboy Joe, Big Max, Ding Bat, Joe Blow, Can Heat, Wimpy, English, Denver, Savanna, Buttons, Dusty, Sailor, Smokey, Zumma, Kilowatt, Sandy, Colonel, Tuffy, Yammo, Grease, Crappo, Rhubarb, Oklahoma Shorty, Tar Heel, Elephant Fat, Hopalong, Indian Joe, Coffee Joe, Zipper Mouth, Highpockets, Gunny Sack, Wacky Mack, Liver Lip, Big John, Little Hump, Jew Boy, and Crushed Bones.

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## SHOW BIZ COLLECTIBLES

1. 1940s "WORLD FAIRS OF THE WORLD" poster 11x22 cardboard with pic of black with big lips, nr/mint cond. \$75
2. 1950s "LIVE HORROR STAGE SHOW" poster 14x22 cardboard with ills nr/mint cond. \$30
3. 1950s CIRCUS TRAIN cars plastic includes animal cages-calliope-carousel, set of four 8" long. \$25
4. Early 1960s "IN PERSON BEVERLY HILLBILLIES" red/white/black, 14x22 Cardboard nr/mint cond. \$40
5. 1920s "DICK WHITTINGTON" English vaudeville poster, girl/black cat by fence great color 20x30. \$125
6. JUMBO advertising trade card fine. \$15
7. 1936 MINSTREL ALBUM 7x10, 66 pgs of gags/songs, blacks on cover. \$50
8. 1910s "CARTER THE GREAT" magic poster 14x22, full color cardboard "beats the devil" nr/mint cond. \$200
9. HEANEY magic catalog, 4x6, 22pgs., lots of ills. \$25
10. GREAT HISTORICAL ITEM, late 1920s "WELCOME TO LA" COLONEL LINDEBERGH broadside 6x17, red/white/blue with pic of LINDY nr/mint cond. \$250
11. 19930s "CINDERELLA" show poster colorful 18x24, nr/mint \$50

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Mike Martin's

# CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

## Super Holiday Gift Sale!

Thanks to numerous requests, we're happily extending our Special Sale. Stock up now for the Holidays!

### CIRCUS VIDEO TAPES

Regular price \$29.50 ea. Postpaid.

For a limited time -- Pick any three and get a fourth, of your choice free! Just \$88.50 Postpaid for all four tapes!

- 1). "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA ONE"
- 2). "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA # TWO"
- 3). "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA # THREE"
- 4). "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA VOL. # FOUR"
- 5). "R/B VOL. ONE: 30's - 40's - 50's"
- 6). "R/B VOL. TWO: 40's - 50's - 60's"
- 7). "R/B VOL. THREE: 30's THRU 70's"
- 8). "R/B VOL. FOUR: 30's - 40's - 50's"
- 9). "CIRCUS SCENE 1989"
- 10). "CIRCUS SCENE 1990"
- 11). "ALL AMERICAN MUD SHOWS VOL. # 1"
- 12). "ALL AMERICAN MUD SHOWS VOL. # 2"
- 13). "THE BEST OF EUROPEAN CIRCUS VOL. # 1"
- 14). "THE BEST OF EUROPEAN CIRCUS VOL. # 2"
- 15). "GREAT AMERICAN CARNIVALS VOL. # 1"
- 16). "INTERNATIONAL SHOWTIME"
- 17). "SUPER SIDESHOW SPECIAL"
- 18). "SUPER CIRCUS" & "SEALTEST BIG TOP"
- 19). "CIRCUS TIME" & "AT THE CIRCUS"
- 20). "FREAKS" & "CHAINED FOR LIFE"
- 21). "BEING DIFFERENT"
- 22). "CIRCUS BOY" & "FRONTIER CIRCUS"

### CIRCUS AUDIO TAPES

Regular price \$10.50 ea. Postpaid.

Pick 2 for \$21.00 - get one more tape free.  
Pick 4 for \$42.00 - get two more tapes free.  
Pick 6 for \$63.00 - get three more tapes free.

- 1). "CIRCUS IN TOWN" - DECCA
- 2). "CIRCUS TIME" - DECCA
- 3). "RBB&B CIRCUS BAND" - CAPITOL
- 4). "MUSIC FROM THE BIG TOP" - EVEREST
- 5). "CIRCUS SPECTACULAR" - LONDON
- 6). "MERLE & R/B BAND" - RCA 1931
- 7). "MERLE & R/B BAND" - COLUMBIA 1941
- 8). "SINGING RINGMASTER" - HAROLD RONK
- 9). BEATTY-COLE CIRCUS: '65/'69/'74 or 1978
- 10). MILLS BROS. CIRCUS: '55/'60/'62/'63 or 1966
- 11). KING BROS. CIRCUS: '62/'71/'72/'73 or 1974
- 12). CARSON & BARNES: '73/74/78/79/80/83 or 1987
- 13). CIRCUS VARGAS: '76/'77 or 1978
- 14). HOXIE BROS. CIRCUS: 1975 or 1982
- 15). SELLS & GRAY CIRCUS: 1972 or 1974
- 16). MERLE EVANS LIVE CONCERT DATE - 1968
- 17). "A NOSTALGIC TRIO" - King/McKennon/Castle
- 18). "MUSIC FROM G.S.O.E."
- 19). "1943 FITCH BANDWAGON"
- 20). R/B CIRCUS WORLD - SHOW PERFORMANCES
- 21). CIRCUS & CARNIVAL SIDE SHOW BALLYS
- 22). ROYAL AMERICAN CAROUSEL BAND ORGAN

These are just a few of our tapes, please feel free to also select tapes from our Catalog. Special sale prices valid ONLY until December 15, 1996

All orders in the Continental U.S. & Canada Postpaid. Europe & the rest of the world please add \$10.00 per order. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

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